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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

# CHRISTIANCOURIER



## When sorrows like sea billows roll: Tim Bosma and the Body of Christ

Peter Schuurman

The Bosma family, their church community and a vast, sympathetic cross-section of the wider public agonized through eight days of heartsick worry as police searched for Tim Bosma, a young father abducted from his home in Ancaster, Ont. The evening of May 6th he took two men for a test drive in his advertised pick-up truck, telling his wife he would be back soon. He never returned. The case was very

quickly turned over to homicide detectives, who gradually uncovered Bosma's phone, a suspect, the missing truck and finally, on day eight, his murdered body.

At the time of writing, Dellen Millard, the 27-year-old owner of an airline company, has been charged with first-degree murder, a charge to which he plans to plead not guilty. At least two other suspects are being tracked down, a second car has been implicated, his wife Sharlene hosted a press



*Some describe the Reformed community as a bubble, but Tim's tragic death has shown that we are woven into the tapestry of Canada.*

conference at Ancaster CRC and social media is buzzing with questions, conjectures and cries to God.

Timothy Henk Lenard Bosma, 32, was the only son of Henk and Mary Bosma. He had three sisters. After attending Calvin

Christian School in Hamilton, Ancaster High School and then trade school, he married Sharlene Veenstra, a former student of Woodland Christian High, on February 13, 2010. They were blessed with a daughter a year later.



*"Saints like you and me" by Rev. Nancy Mills.*

Tim and Sharlene lived in a house he built in rural Ancaster, where he was just launching a new construction business. Blond and blue-eyed, he looked like a Dutch cousin, or that young CRC man  
*See Tim Bosma on page 2*

## National March for Life continues to grow

Angela Reitsma Bick

Facing down an 80 percent chance of rain, over 20,000 pro-life protestors filled the streets of Ottawa for the 16th National March for Life, held this year on May 9, under sunny skies. Attendance at the March, the largest annual rally on Parliament Hill, has been increasing steadily for several years. This year, 21 Conservative Members of Parliament and two Senators participated.

Despite a cultural climate that supports abortion, Canada's pro-life movement is growing. The *Globe and Mail* reported on the March for Life dismissively, concluding that 59 percent of Canadians see "no point in re-

opening [the abortion] debate." The number of March participants, however, proves that at the heart of every prediction is a shot-in-the-dark guess. The weatherman was wrong. Maybe the *Globe* is too.

This year, construction on Parliament Hill slowed the demonstrators down, as LifeSiteNews.com explained. Heading down the Hill into town took "considerably longer because of a bottleneck at the one narrow exit. [It] resulted in an estimated 2,000 attendees not being able to get off the Hill [to start] the March before the front of the March returned to Parliament Hill."

Traditionally, abortion advocates focus on the rights of women, while pro-lifers emphasize the

rights of unborn babies. In a move perhaps geared to appeal to the opposition, the 2013 March focused on a call to end female gendercide.

"A woman's right to choose," Campaign Life Coalition organizer Alissa Golob said, "is resulting in there being no more women." Two studies released last year suggest that female gendercide — aborting females in favour of males — is now happening in Canada as it does in countries such as India and China. A CBC documentary called "Unnatural Selection" (June 2012) tracks how private clinics are being used to identify baby's gender earlier than a doctor will. And with that

*See March on page 3*



*Just a few of the superheroes ready to "defend life" in this year's pro-life parade.*



## News

Tim Bosma *continued*

you met at a campground. A dedicated father and church member, Tim was known as a quiet, hard-working soul who liked to joke and have water fights with his nephews and nieces. He was deeply loved by all who knew him, including his black Great Dane named Ava.

After the shocking news of his death, commentators used words like "senseless" and "tragic," and Sharlene, in a May 15 press conference, said "I am broken, and part of me is gone." Still, she spent a significant amount of her short address to the public expressing gratitude – to the police, to the media and to the general public for their overwhelming show of support. Prime Minister Stephen Harper tweeted that he is praying for the Bosmas, and Premier Kathleen Wynne also noted that "her heart goes out to Tim Bosma's family and friends."

## Desperate search

Tim's cousin Lisa (Bosma) Hogeveen visited the family in Ancaster on the first Friday after Tim went missing, where she said there was a constant flow of people coming and going from Tim's house. The large garage had been set up as a command post for discharging volunteers to hang posters all over southern Ontario. People brought in coffee, donuts, sandwiches and meals for the family and the volunteers. Tim's close friends, Brad Bootsma and Josh Boonstra among them, spent 15 hours a day plastering the "missing" posters around the region. I was told that thousands of flyers were put under windshields at Lime Ridge Mall in Hamilton, and that someone came to the Bosma family's door with \$1,000 worth of M&M meats. Queen's University campus minister Steve Kooy, Tim's former youth pastor, said it all reminded him of Jesus' story of the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to desperately seek the one.

Rev. Kooy named the Bosma family as long-time "pillars of the Ancaster CRC congregation." Tim grew up in this church, was married in this church and had his daughter baptized in this church. Church member Vicky Dykstra reported that 200 people gathered there for a prayer service the day after Tim went missing. About 500 came out for another service on Friday, May 10.

One thing that has distinguished this unfolding drama from the start has been the constant murmur of prayers. Petitions, lament, complaint, gratitude and more petitions. The outcome was far from what those who prayed pleaded for, and yet many people continue to trust and rest in the hope that God will make amends in time for the pain of this nightmare.

## Public witness

When you think of the scope of this event, it would not be overstating the case to say that never before has the CRC church been so publicly visible, so pervasively discussed and so positively described in the history of the denomination in Canada. Some describe the Reformed community as a detached social bubble, and while any vital community resembles a bubble, these eight days have demonstrated that we also are like a tapestry whose weave



*Flowers and cards at the end of the Bosmas' driveway.*

connects us to the market, media and police services of this country in a surprising and significant way.

New social media played a remarkably critical role in magnifying awareness of this story. Tim's friends and family were far from alone in their vertigo and grief. People spread news updates through their Facebook and Twitter accounts, and thousands posted their prayers, poems and memorial videos from locations across the continent. Many admitted to tears over the death of Tim – a stranger to them. Some comments beneath web-pages were kind, profound and stirring, while a few lacked tact. Millions have been deeply moved. One comment revealed: "Although not a particularly religious person . . . I applaud the members of their church and indeed their faith for supporting the family in their grief. . . . God bless the Bosma family and all who support them."

I stumbled on another comment where someone was explaining that Tim's faith tradition was best expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. #1: "What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. . . ." Cyberspace could not be graced with better words in these difficult days.

Ray Pennings, Executive Vice President of Cardus, a Christian social think-tank, blogged about watching the police news conference and thinking about Jesus, at the graveside of Lazarus, being "deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled," and publicly weeping alongside the other mourners. "It is especially at these times that the various institutions and communities that comprise society serve their most important role," he wrote on May 15th. "The strong family, church and neighbourhood communities that the Bosmas are supported by cannot take away the pain, but can support them through their agony."

## My light, my strength, my song

On Sunday, May 19, CRC churches all across the world (250 at last count) sang the hymn "In Christ alone" in support of the Tim Bosma family.

## A communal petition

Heavenly Father.

You know how heavy our hearts are tonight.

You know how dark the road is that we are travelling on.

It is a road full of pain and sorrow and anger and questions.

God, nothing on earth can bring us the comfort we need today, it has to come from above, from you.

Lift us up for we have fallen hard.

Lift up Sharlene and her daughter.

Lift up Tim's parents.

Lift up Tim's family.

Lift up Tim's closest friends – friends who in many ways were like his brothers.

Lift up his church family, both near to home and far away.

Lift up all who have been impacted by this tragedy and who are mourning with us.

We need you Lord God, and so we put all of our trust in you.

Turn to us, and be gracious to us, our hope, Lord.

– Rev. Steve Kooy, Prayer service on May 16.



## Together as one 'body'

Rev. John Veenstra, the transitional pastor at Ancaster CRC after his brother Bill Veenstra left to accept a call in Chilliwack, B.C., was interviewed on CBC radio on May 14 by Kathleen Petty. Pastor John explained what faith means in the face of adversity:

"We have experienced in spades the value of being part of a religious community. The verse from Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 keeps coming back to me over and over: you are the body of Christ and when one part suffers all parts suffer together. If one part is pleased then all other parts share the joy. We share the pain, we share the joy . . . if you're really part of an active church community you are not lonely. You are baking a pie for somebody and you're bringing it, you're calling up to ask 'What can we do?' We have asked people to back off that sort of thing because the phone here and at the residence is just going non-stop. People just wanting to help."

Pastor John reminds us that this horrific event has simultaneously shown the best side of God's people, and, by God's common grace, the best side of those from many different walks of life.

I attended a congregational prayer service at Ancaster CRC two days after Tim's death was confirmed by police. Similar services were held across Ontario. This one focused on grief, including a ritual of ripping cloth and sprinkling dust and ashes to make the grief visible. Two hundred and fifty people heard Job and Psalms, and ended the service with the mourner's testimony "It is Well With My Soul."

The challenge now is to carry forward the momentum of giving and gratitude – to keep on nurturing these intense desires to do good, to support the broken and to pursue justice and mercy rather than revenge. The temptation to hunker down in fear must be overcome by the Spirit-inspired courage to be as vulnerable as Jesus and to press on as agents of renewal in our communities.

Sharlene Bosma has lost her husband, and their daughter has lost her father. When I said to my wife that God's son was also brutally murdered, somewhere around the age of 32, my wife replied, "Then Tim's in good company now." Yes, they are brothers in the presence of their Father, our Father, and we are all still family.

Peter Schuurman is working on his PhD in Religious Studies (U Waterloo) from his home in Guelph.



## A shared grief

Their church is accepting cards on behalf of the Bosmas.

Attn. to the Bosma family  
Ancaster Christian Reformed Church  
Fiddlers Green PO 81151  
Ancaster ON L9G 4X2

The website [inmemoryoftimbosma.ca](http://inmemoryoftimbosma.ca) has been set up with instructions for making a donation to Tim's family. You can also email [inmemoryoftimbosma@gmail.com](mailto:inmemoryoftimbosma@gmail.com) and ask Matt Goss, an authorized representative for the Bosma family, questions about donating.



## Reflection

## Under God's wings

Bruce Adema

Sunday the 12th of May was Mothers' Day. It was also the Sunday on which the location and circumstance of Tim Bosma was unknown. That day prayers and petitions from churches far and wide went up to the Lord: *Please, bring Tim home. Please, let him be safe. Lord, have mercy.*

On that Sunday my preaching text was Psalm 91. Months earlier I and the worship team decided to have it be the focus for Mothers' Day Sunday because it powerfully depicts God's care and defense of his children, comparing God to a fiercely protective hen and us to chicks in absolute need of divine shielding from the enemy.

<sup>3</sup> Surely he will save you  
from the fowler's snare  
and from the deadly pestilence.

<sup>4</sup> He will cover you with his feathers,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

As we read those verses together, I knew that few would be thinking about their mothers at that moment. Instead, people were thinking about Tim. And they were wondering: are these words true? Is the Lord fiercely protecting him today? Is Tim secure under God's wings? After a few moments, people probably started to wonder



*Our Lord never abandoned Tim Bosma. Tim is still under the cover of the wings of his God.*

about some other questions: are these words true for my daughter with cancer? Are they true for my dad falling into the shadowy world of dementia? Are they true for me, with my struggles and fears?

To find answers to these hard but important questions, we as congregation tried to understand God's pain as the world long ago slipped from wholeness to brokenness. We struggled to imagine God's wounded heart as he saw evils and atrocities being committed against his creation

and against his people.

The fierce determination of Jesus as he set his face toward Calvary, and on the way enduring betrayal, denial, taunts and torture, points us to gospel truth. Salvation is not escape from the attacks of evil, but rather confident hope in the Lord's victory that lies beyond those attacks. Beyond cancer, beyond Alzheimer's Disease, beyond violent assaults, even beyond murder most foul, stands the God who makes everything new. The Lord of resurrection and the Guarantor of eternal life. The One who with all his power and fierce determination hangs on to his people and shows them the full extent of his love.

Our Lord never abandoned Tim Bosma. Tim is still under the cover of the wings of his God. Nor has our Lord abandoned us in our sorrow and pain at Tim's death. We also can experience the sanctuary of the Lord's protection and peace, even as we walk through this dark valley.

<sup>1</sup> Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

<sup>2</sup> I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,  
my God, in whom I trust." ✠

Rev. Bruce Adema is Pastor of Bethel  
CRC in Waterdown, Ont.



## March continued



MP Mark Wawara of Langley, B.C. introduced a bill to prohibit sex-selective abortion.

information, "women are aborting the girls," one health officer confirms.

"Ninety-two percent of Canadians say [it's] wrong," Mark Wawara, the MP who proposed Motion-408 to stop female gendercide, said in a speech. "I say it's wrong. You say it's wrong. So together we will keep up the fight, and we will win." Some protestors held signs that read, "It's a girl' should not be a death sentence."

## Backbencher support

Three million unborn babies have died in Canada since 1969, when Pierre Trudeau's Omnibus Bill struck down the ban against abortion. (That number is based on the abortions reported by hospitals and clinics to Statistics Canada.) Today, Canada is one of only a few countries with no legal restrictions against it, partially because the issue is so deeply divisive that discussing abortion, or even defining it, is avoided.

"Pro-life MPs are under tremendous pressure to keep quiet, to toe the line, to not stand up for life," said former Liberal MP Pat O'Brien on May 9. "They defy that pressure" to join the March for Life.

Given the size of this year's pro-life rally, politicians may not be able to avoid discussing it much longer. "The Canadian news media cannot ignore you," Carl Anderson of the Knights of Columbus told protestors. "Soon the government will not be able to ignore you." ✠



Angela Reitsma Bick is Editor of Christian Courier. She lives in Barrie, Ont. with her family.

## Actions speak loudest

Recent news stories have challenged the prevailing assumption that unborn babies are not really people. Can Ariel Castro be charged with multiple counts of murder for beating the women he held captive in order to end their pregnancies, unless those premature babies are considered human?

Can Kermit Gosnell be convicted of murdering babies fresh from the womb, when the same process performed in utero would have been on safe legal ground?

Would "comfort care" be offered to the "results" of unsuccessful abortions, as Dr. Karen Feisullin testified during Gosnell's trial she does as a licensed Ob-gyn, unless it's obvious that the dying babies are human?

Can the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge be congratulated on the news of their pregnancy, as heads of state all over the world did during her first trimester, without that "bundle of cells" being granted personhood? Nobody has hesitated to speculate on the royal baby's name, appearance, schools, siblings or route to the throne – not to mention Kate's wardrobe – as the baby grows. May our minds be similarly engaged in imagining every unborn baby's life.



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## Editorial

## Where's the sun?



Bert Witvoet

Much has been said and written about the decline of church attendance in Western countries, which indicates a disease that is spreading fast. In and of itself church attendance is not the key issue facing Christianity. A full church

is not necessarily a healthy church, nor is a sparsely attended church necessarily an unfaithful church. The main issue we face as church communities in our surrounding culture is whether or not we live to the fullest a life of reconciliation with God, our neighbour and the rest of creation. Reconciliation is the key to spiritual health. If people can achieve that without darkening the entrances of a church, whether that be a formal institution or a house church, more power to them, especially Holy Spirit power. But I doubt whether anyone can keep that up very long. God himself is a communal God who expects us to live and grow in community.

I just finished reading a Dutch book written by a Reformed pastor, Dr. C. Graafland (*Gereformeerden op zoek naar God*). It examines a phenomenon the author calls "Godsverduistering." The best translation I can come up with is: "God eclipse." (The concept originated with Jewish cultural philosopher Martin Buber.) The image is taken from a solar eclipse. Whenever there is such an eclipse, the sun does not cease to exist or disappear, but another body, namely the moon, blocks out the light that normally travels from the sun to the earth.

Dr. Graafland explains "God eclipse" this way. It's not that a large number of people say that God does not exist, even though more people declare themselves to be atheists than before. No, it's more that they think that God is irrelevant to their lives. They have no need of a connection with God. They don't experience God in their day-to-day lives because something in their surrounding culture is blocking out God. This obstruction affects even church people. Many pews are filled with nihilists-in-waiting. The message does not grab them, and there is very little carry-over from what they hear and confess in church and what they do and experience throughout the week. This is not necessarily the fault of the preacher, although it could be. The fault may lie somewhere else.



What is blocking our view of God's light in the world?

## Alienated from God

According to Graafland, the phenomenon of "God eclipse" is both our own responsibility as individuals and groups of individuals (churches and schools, for example), but it's also an external reality over which we have little or no control. We live in a society that has declared itself to be autonomous as well as thoroughly secular. Whatever circle we move in – politics, education, workplace, science, technology, television, movies, music, art, ethics, law, sport, journalism, human rights – God has been successfully removed from sight. It's like driving in Beijing, with such heavy pollution that you can't see the sky anymore. In other words, "God eclipse" is our fate in the 21st century. Everyone experiences it. Even the most orthodox and faithful church members cannot escape this spiritual darkening of life.



"Gotta serve somebody," as Bob Dylan says.

The decline in church attendance can be attributed to this sense of not needing God in our life. As such it's a serious outcome. The sense of alienation from God and his people will increase that way. God's absence from our consciousness does not make the heart grow fonder.

Of course, our religious nature will not leave us, and so we end up expressing that inescapable need to worship in other ways: joining the environmental movement, the search for peace, the quest for human rights, volunteerism, other religions or philosophies, consumerism, pursuit of dominance and power – the list is endless. According to Bob Dylan, "You're gonna have to serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody." Everyone intuitively knows that salvation does not lie within our own bosom. We were made in God's image, and that includes a sense of restlessness that pushes us to lose ourselves in something sublime outside ourselves. The object of our worship may be noble or ignoble, but we embrace it to satisfy our inner needs. In the long run only the living God can fill that need for wholeness and purpose. As Augustine wrote in

his *Confessions* centuries ago, "My heart is restless until it rests in Thee."

## Is there a solution?

What can we as Christians do to counteract the eclipse experience? I hardly dare even pose that question. The phenomenon is too complex and too huge to come up with anything that looks like a prescription. But let me be foolish enough to entertain the question.

We could start by at least being aware of the times in which we live. Even though I don't believe in passive acceptance of the status quo, I don't think we should twist ourselves into all kinds of frantic and acrobatic contortions. There is something almost inevitable in all this. Certainly, powerful forces in the order of principalities are needed to reverse this trend. The trend is overwhelmingly dominant, especially in Western countries.

Is it our prosperity that stands in the way of seeing God's light in the world that the Gospel of John speaks so eloquently about: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men"? Is it our dependency on medical know-how and technological solutions to problems that creates the illusion of human autonomy? Our Western darkness, whatever is behind it, makes it hard to grasp that we need the Light of the world. The "God eclipse" blocks out the Word become flesh. So are we fighting a losing battle?

The Patriarch Jacob spoke a significant prophecy 4,000 years before Christ that is being fulfilled even today. Without realizing what he was saying, he prophesied that "the scepter will not depart from Judah." In other words, Christ, who is the Lion of Judah, is on the winning side of the spiritual battle that rages throughout the centuries. Our time is not more critical than other times in that respect. The gates of hell and the apparent success of the "God eclipse" will not prevail against the Church of Christ. That is the big picture, which should always give us hope.

And within that reality, there are things we can do – for ourselves, for our families, and for the church. God willing, we can even lessen the eclipse for others and for the world. The Spirit of Jesus is our enabler. I don't have the solution to the declining church attendance or the God eclipse per se, but I am hesitantly willing to throw out a few crumbs of personal reflections to get the conversation started on how we can live out of the hope and promise of the resurrection.

## A thimble-full of crumbs

\* From the beginning God wanted us to walk with him. Now walking is a fairly slow and relaxed form of mobility. It allows for good communication and intimacy. That's the kind of relationship God wants with us. As individuals and families we need that kind relationship with God. If we are not in a walking-with-God frame of mind from day-to-day, we cannot expect to be touched by the message of the preacher or the prayers and singing of the congregation.

\* It may help to develop a way of seeing our cultural and social surroundings as either an obedient or disobedient response to God's call as Creator and Redeemer. Everything we see and experience has a God factor and a Jesus factor to it, if we ask the right questions and continue to see our society's need for restoration.

\* We must not so much try to change the world as find out where the Spirit of Jesus is already at work and join him in that work. This awareness can come to us through

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## Letters/Meditation

## The hard work of hope

Bernie De Jonge

There are three essential Christian virtues: faith, hope and love. A short catechism frequently quoted by the Apostle in his writings . . . the greatest is love, we're told, and the hardest is hope. We grow weary and lose heart in the face of evil's wretched work. What we see with our eyes, touch with our hands, feel in our bodies – these we have an easier time believing than a promise we hear with our ears. So we rage against the demonic darkness that has robbed us all of a life of promise, a husband, a son, brother and more.

The promises of God are to be music to our ears . . . but some days, the music is hard to hear because of the throbbing sorrow pounding in our spirit's ear. The evidence of a life cut short drowns out the sweetness of what could have been, what should have been. Hope has to do with "seeing" something in the future to live towards; hope is the vision of a good day coming; it energizes the spirit. But it's hard to "see" hope when one cannot even pay attention to the here and now – the heart is in shock.

But there will come a time, perhaps in the not-too-distant future, when the heart will be lifted a little. We'll catch ourselves smiling at the laughter of a child; we'll



Members of Tim Bosma's church noticed the blooms on this tree (on church property) the day his death was confirmed.

notice the magnolia in bloom and marvel at its beauty; we'll step out of our grief for a moment and listen for the still, small sounds of life's promise – that life is still good. God is still good. The music of his promises begins to be heard – it's an act of faith. Faith believes there is a music to the spheres that the heart can hear, if it is stilled. Hope is the decision to dance again to that music. Hope is a decision, a decision of the heart to live, to "dance" to God's promises of life in the face of grievous sorrow.

Hope dances to what you will decide to hear and pay attention to . . . and that's work, hard work . . . to decide to look at the good things and refrain from being obsessed by how we've been robbed.

Where there's life, there's hope. Faith hears the music of God's life-filled promises; hope begins to dance to that music; and once again love will say, "Come dance with me to the music of God's promise."

We may dance haltingly, with a limp, unsure of our step . . . but we've begun to live again and joy will return. ✨

Rev. Bernie De Jonge is retired, now serving as a volunteer Support Pastor at New Life CRC in Guelph, Ont. He returned to Ancaster CRC to perform Tim and Sharlene's wedding in 2010.

## Redford: just as transparent as Klein

In "Budget season in Canada" (April 8, 2013), Mike Wevers suggests the Redford iteration of Alberta's Conservatives has abandoned Ralph Klein's legacy of transparency because Redford's decision to have three plans instead of a single spending plan makes it more difficult to determine the real bottom line. Is the bottom line really the most important component of a government's budget?

I might ask instead: what does the budget accomplish, or fail to accomplish in advancing the public good? Who does it benefit, and who is left out? Is the revenue raised in keeping with Adam Smith's

*Wealth of Nations* principle for taxes that, "as nearly as possible, in proportion to their respective abilities; that is, in proportion to the revenue which they respectively enjoy under the protection of the state"? Only after first asking those question, does the bottom line merit any consideration at all.

It took me mere seconds on the internet to find the numbers I wanted to see in the most recent Alberta budget – about the same amount of time and the same degree of transparency as during the Klein years.

Jake Kuiken  
Calgary, Alta.

Where's the sun? *continued*

prayer and exploration. Paul did not think of crossing the Aegean Sea into Europe until a man in Macedonia called to him in a vision.

\* We can work at developing Christian cultural expressions of life on earth. This is not an easy religion-coating kind of effort, but it includes hard work and requires authenticity and persistence. Carpenters, for example, can build cabinets and sun decks with great integrity of work habits and fair pricing. That is being biblically counter-cultural. If in the course of their work they have an opportunity to testify to the hope that is in them, that is an added bonus.

\* We are called to live sacrificial lives in the midst of a world that is suffering and groping around in the darkness, so that the light of Christ shines through us in spite of the eclipsing structures. Who we are and what we do speaks louder than what we say. And listening opens more doors than speaking.

\* Churches need to re-examine their structure and culture to see if they are still speaking to a new generation that prizes authenticity and a deeply rooted desire to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

\* Reject with all your heart the society-wide notion that we are entitled to our place in the sun, and that freedom of choice outside the demands of God's will for life is the key to happiness. Embrace instead the posture of an obedient and grateful servant who delights in counting her blessings.

A lot of people have said wiser things than what this impromptu editorial can produce. I have no idea whether we can significantly stem the tide of "Godsverduistering" and diminished church attendance in our society this way. But Jesus did promise that, if we are faithful in carrying out his mandate to make disciples of all nations and generations, he would be with us and our children till the very end of the age. ✨

Bert Witvoet is not impressed with the claim that one can be a good Christian while avoiding worship with other Christians. Christians are living body parts that cannot exist in isolation of each other, Christ being the head of that body.

## God is above our conflicting theories

Rudy Eikelboom's column, "Leading Like Daniel: Calvin's Haarsma new President of BioLogos" (March 25, 2013) tries to suggest that there is a conflict between science and faith, when no such conflict exists. Operational science is studied and performed quite happily by those who hold to a Biblical understanding of origins.

There are thousands of scientists in virtually every field of scientific study who hold to a Biblical, young earth, six-day creation as written by God himself in the book of Genesis. Do they claim to know or be able to explain everything? Of course not, but they do maintain that God does, and so theories that conflict with what he has said and his gospel message of salvation do not trump the clear reading of scripture. (See [creation.com](http://creation.com) or [answersingenesis.org](http://answersingenesis.org) for more information.)

Furthermore, since the evolutionary worldview is hardly without its problems, it is foolish to embrace it. It simply doesn't make logical, theological or scientific sense. The idea of evolution was only

made up to remove the need for a Creator and therefore accountability. And yes, the theory took shape long before Charles Darwin wrote his book.

If creation as written in scripture cannot be believed because it doesn't stand up to "scientific" scrutiny, what else do we need to reinterpret? Do we need to make up stories to replace those in the Bible where we are told about the parting of the sea, Jonah and the great fish, a virgin birth or a man rising from the dead?

It's time to take a stand on biblical authority.

Arnold Bosman  
Listowel, Ont.

## Correction

In Curt Gesch's column (p. 14) of the April 22 issue, we mistakenly attributed a verse to Ecclesiastes when in fact it comes from Ecclesiasticus, an Apocryphal book. We apologize for any confusion.

— Angela Reitsma Bick

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## News

## Personal story

## How an imam's son became a pastor

DHAKA, Bangladesh (ICC) — In a remote part of Bangladesh Masud grew up in a strict Muslim home. His father was an Imam, so Masud grew up with full knowledge of the Quran and considered himself to be a radical Muslim.

As he grew older, however, he began to wonder about the Jesus he read about in the Quran. It was an early sign of the Spirit's work. "Who is Jesus?" he asked his father. "Is the Quran true? Is the Bible true? The Quran says we must study all the books that came before (the Torah); why don't we study these? The Quran says we must study the teaching of Jesus because he was more than a prophet; why don't we?" The questions angered his father and he beat Masud, insisting he not question his faith.

Masud was sitting with friends one day when a Christian pastor came to their village and shared the Gospel of Christ. The pastor used the Quran to point them to Issa (Jesus). Masud's spirit was moved and he recognized the truth of the Gospel.

Masud became a follower of Jesus, was baptized and began to travel with the pastor. Little did he know that the declaration he made with his lips and the outward sign of baptism would result in painful persecution.

## Blasphemy

The Muslims in his village were furious at the pastor for sharing the Gospel and at Masud for forsaking Islam. Some of them dragged the pastor to Masud's house, tied him to a chair and savagely beat him. When they asked Masud if he believed what the pastor believed, and he answered "yes," they beat Masud, too. They couldn't understand what they considered this blasphemy in an imam's son.

The persecution did not end there. Masud went to the police and filed a report which asked for the police to protect him from these violent men. Masud's father was friends with the police, who were powerful. They told his father, "Your son has asked for protection from Muslims because he is now a Christian." But instead of protecting Masud, the police beat him while his father watched. Sadly, this form of persecution is not at all uncommon.

The police next found Masud's wife and told her, "Your husband is no longer a Muslim and you cannot be with

him. We will find you a new husband." Masud's wife refused, pledging to stay with her husband. Not long after, she became a believer herself.

Despite all that, Masud was not deterred from his new faith in Jesus. Instead, he realized that suffering for Christ was worth the price. He also realized that he would not be able to learn more about God unless someone taught him. That would be impossible in a village where he and his wife were the only Christians. He went back to the pastor and said, "I must leave. I want more training in how to know God and to know the Bible more. How can I get this training?"

The pastor told Masud about a Christian discipleship program led by believers in Dhaka, the capital. A poor man, he prayed and asked God for money for the long bus ride he would need to take. God answered that prayer quickly, and Masud and his wife left, taking with them only what they could fit into a few bags.

For safety, the discipleship program was held in a secret location. Masud and his wife deepened in faith. They learned how to read Scripture, how to hear God's voice, how to pray, how to know the difference between ritual and actually knowing and loving God. When they completed their program they felt called to become underground pastors. They now help run the program and they disciple other former Muslims who have professed Christ as God and Lord.

Masud also shares the Gospel by running a small website where he chats with Muslims who want to know more about Jesus. He presents questions from the Quran which lead to discussions about faith, the Bible and the Lord. He uses the teachings of the Quran, which Muslims accept, to point them to Jesus and the Bible. In this way many are coming to know the Lord.

Masud went from the devout Muslim son of an Imam, to a believer in Jesus, to a man who suffered persecution for Christ's sake. The Lord radically changed his life and Masud devoted it back to the Lord.

Please pray for Masud and his wife as they live and work for the Gospel in a country — one of many — where as a religious minority they face danger and persecution for their devotion to Jesus. ➤

## CRC renews search for new leader after candidate drops out

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich./BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) — The Christian Reformed Church has renewed the search for its next executive director after its potential nominee unexpectedly withdrew from the process.

The CRC's board of trustees met as May began in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and was scheduled to interview the candidate who had been identified by its search committee. A successful interview would have resulted in the candidate being recommended to Synod 2013 for appointment when synod meets in June. The board learned on May 2 that the

candidate had withdrawn. As a result, the board instructed its executive committee to determine and recommend next steps.

The board simultaneously extended the terms of Rev. Joel Boot and Rev. Peter Borgdorff as executive director and deputy executive director, respectively, until a new candidate can be appointed.

As of press time, the board had not decided whether it would open the process to additional applications or choose from those already received. The board's executive committee was working on a plan for moving forward. ➤

## Britain: Kids should be taught 'not all porn is bad' says sex ed group

LONDON (TCI) — School pupils should be taught that "not all pornography is bad," according to a group of British sex education campaigners. The Sex Education Forum (SEF) was criticized for its stances, and for publishing a resource for teachers which suggests that they bear in mind that pornography is "hugely diverse." The e-magazine called *The Pornography Issue* also recommends a youth forum website that tells teenagers "porn can be great" and aims to tackle a series of "myths" on the subject.

The SEF's e-magazine features an interview with a teacher from Sheffield who asserted that her 15- and 16-year-old pupils "need the chance to consider the pros and cons, and there should be balanced teaching about it, not just negatives."

Lucy Emmerson, coordinator of the SEForum, said,

"Teachers have told us they are nervous about mentioning pornography, yet given the ease with which children are able to access explicit sexual content on the internet, it is vital that teachers can respond to this reality appropriately."

One of SEF's critics, Norman Wells of the Family Education Trust, said that to give lessons on pornography is "to play with fire." Pornography doesn't have an up side, said Wells.

"The intention appears to be to steer children and young people away from a belief in moral absolutes and to encourage them to think that there are no rights and wrongs when it comes to sexual expression," Wells concluded. "To take a no-holds barred approach to sex education has the potential to break down pupils' natural sense of reserve and to encourage casual attitudes towards sex." ➤

## Egypt: Coptic pope says Christian unity needed 'quickly, seriously'



The two Popes, Copt and Catholic, pray together at the first such meeting in 40 years.

VATICAN CITY (CNA/EWTN News) — The Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt spoke about the urgent need for unity among Christians in the Middle East when he met with Roman Catholic Pope Francis at the Vatican earlier this month. "We must prepare our people for this very real and needed unity that we know and live, we must work quickly and seriously," said Pope Tawadros II.

Tawadros' visit to the Vatican was significant because he leads Egypt's largest Christian church with 10 million members. The visit was also historic in that it was the first visit to Rome in 40 years. In November 2012, Pope Tawadros was elected as the Coptic Orthodox Church's 118th pope, succeeding Pope Shenouda III. The church is said to have been founded by the Apostle Mark.

"The rising of Islamic parties in countries like Egypt and Syria means Christians are now feeling they are second or third class citizens," said Father Rafic Greiche on behalf of Tawadros. Greiche is the director of the press office for the Catholic Church in Egypt. In 2010 a New Year's Eve attack in Alexandria by Islamists left 21 Copts dead, and since then there have been additional attacks against Coptic Christians.

"We Egyptian Christians want our brothers of all world churches to help us, to pray for us and to be real brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ," said Greiche. He noted that since the Egyptian uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak, "nothing changed for Christians and normal modern Muslims."

He added, "People are getting poorer; the middle class is getting poorer and homeless, and there is no work or tourism. So we hope our brothers will not help us with money but with solidarity, and that they take our message out to their governments to feel all Christians worldwide are one heart."

Pope Tawadros prayed with Pope Francis for about 20 minutes after their meeting in the Clementine Hall at the Vatican's Apostolic Palace. "The most important aim for both the Catholic and Coptic Churches is the promotion of ecumenical dialogue in order to get to the most pursued goal, unity," Pope Tawadros told Pope Francis.

Pope Francis assured Tawadros of his prayers. "If one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honoured, all rejoice together," Francis said, quoting St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

Francis continued, "Let me assure you that your efforts to build communion among believers in Christ, and your lively interest in the future of your country and the role of the Christian communities within the Egyptian society find a deep echo in the heart of the Successor of Peter and of the entire Catholic community."

Pope Francis pointed out that "the sharing of daily sufferings can become an effective instrument of unity. From shared suffering can blossom forth forgiveness and reconciliation, with God's help." ➤

The SEF countered by saying it wanted to offer "guidance" intended to help schools broach the "potentially difficult and controversial subject" of pornography.

Following a consultation with responses from teachers, parents and local authorities, the British government recently announced that sex education would remain a non-compulsory subject. ➤



## News

## New CRC hymnal released amid several 'firsts'



CRC staff and BOT members gather for an impromptu hymn sing to enjoy the new collection.

**Marian Van Til**, with files from FAR

GRAND RAPIDS, Michigan (FAR) – At the denominational headquarters of the Christian Reformed Church, word spread quickly on the afternoon of May 2 when published copies of the CRC's new hymnal arrived earlier than expected.

*Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs* was published by Faith Alive Resources, the CRC's publishing arm.

*Lift Up Your Hearts* is the first new Christian Reformed denominational hymnal published since 1987 when the gray *Psalter Hymnal* came out. *Lift Up Your Hearts* is also the first CRC hymnal not to be called the *Psalter Hymnal*. And it is the first hymnal produced jointly with another denomination – the other church being the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The RCA's last hymnal, *Rejoice in the Lord*, was, like the last *Psalter Hymnal*, also published in the 1980s.

To try out the shiny new hymnal, CRC staff members and members of the board of trustees (which happened to be meeting in the building) gathered for an impromptu hymn sing.

Rev. Joyce Borger, the hymnal's editor, and Faith Alive's worship and music editor, asserted, "This is a hymnal of the church, for the church." She could particularly say that, given the kind of work involved in producing the hymnbook.

### Extensive, careful process

Compiling a hymnal is a years'-long process involving extensive research by a committee of musical and theological experts. But the careful preparation also included singing focus groups made up of both CRC and RCA leaders and church members of a variety of ages. Faith Alive concluded that, though there is still strong

hymn singing in both denominations, there was a need to expand the variety of songs available in a new hymnal. At the same time, keeping classic hymns that are theologically and musically sound, and that people love, was also important.

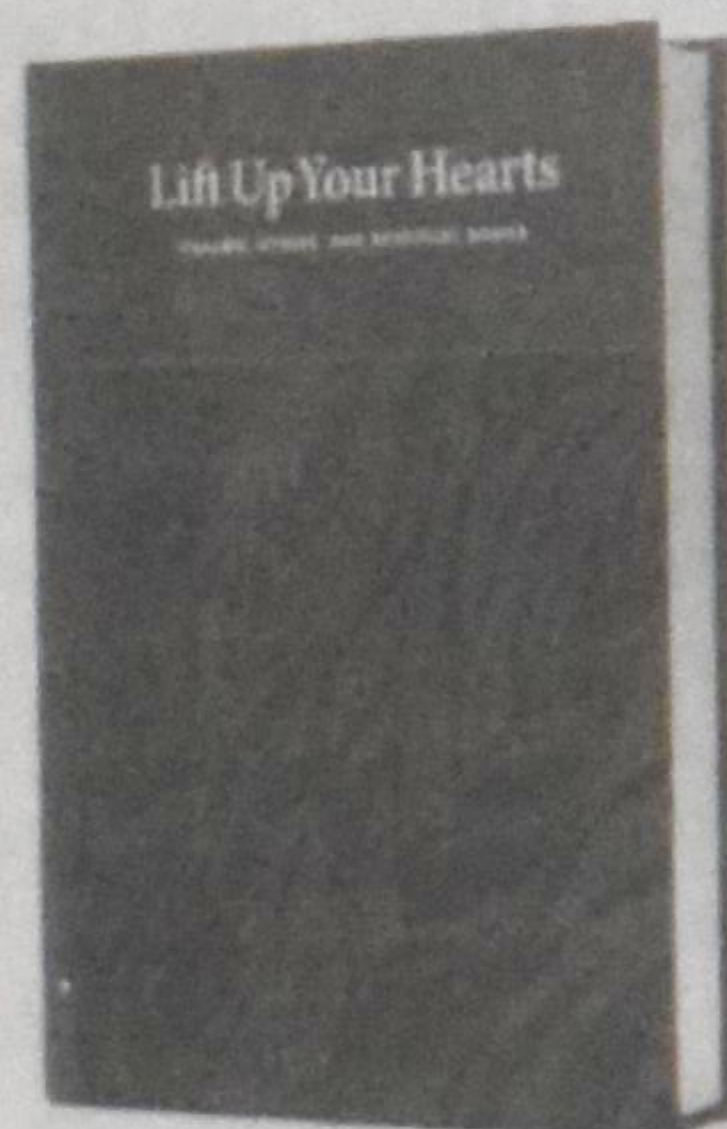
"So much has changed in the past 20 years," Borger noted. "With more focus on social justice issues, creation care, authentic emotions and global awareness, along with greater ethnic diversity, we are a different church. Songs need to be added to the existing repertoire of our churches to reflect these changes, while maintaining the timeless classics we've grown to know and love."

*Lift Up Your Hearts* is organized in two sections. The first encapsulates the story of redemption from creation to the new creation, and within that the life of Christ and the events of the church year: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, etc. The second section is arranged in terms of the Sunday liturgy, i.e., the order of worship.

The book is currently available in a hardcover pew edition. At the end of May a spiral-bound edition will be released. There will also be a digital edition from which music and texts may be projected onto a screen. That edition, however, will not be available until August.

Joyce Borger summed up the intent of the hymnal compilers. "Our ultimate desire is that this collection be deep enough to give voice to our praises and laments, be both sung prayer and proclamation, and play a significant role in the faith formation of Reformed Christians old and young alike."

Faith Alive has already begun to ship copies of *Lift Up Your Hearts*. Congregations (or individuals) in the U.S. or Canada may order the hymnal by calling 1-800-333-8300. ➤



## 'Twin monsters' threaten Nigerians, say church leaders

BRUSSELS, Belgium (CCO/ACN) – When addressing the foreign affairs committee of the European Parliament in Brussels earlier this month, two Nigerian church leaders – Cardinal John Onaiyekan of Abuja and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto – asserted that their country is threatened by "twin monsters": corruption and insecurity.

According to Onaiyekan and Kukah, Nigeria has a GDP of \$244 billion and is also a recipient of generous international aid, so it is not a poor country. "But the corruption and mismanagement is such that precious little reaches the population."

"Corruption," said Onaiyekan, "has generated extremely high levels of mistrust among the population, which feeds into the other daily menace: insecurity." Elaborating on that insecurity, Kukah noted that "very often the criminals are better armed than the Nigerian security forces." He was referring to the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram, which is receiving arms from Libya and has wreaked violent havoc in Nigeria.

Kukah is from northwestern Nigeria where Christians, and more so Catholics, are a very small minority. He said that the socio-economic indicators of health, education and income of northern Nigeria are among the worst in the entire Sub-Saharan Africa. "The region has a Muslim majority in power. The way they spend federal funding follows their own priorities, and the concept of education and public health is not the same as that of UNESCO. This is the region where Boko Haram was created."

Where the government services fail, Christians step in to provide relief services, operating numerous schools, hospitals, legal aid centers and other basic services in Nigeria's most impoverished regions.

Onaiyekan assured the European Parliament that the Catholic Church "is concerned about the well-being of all Nigerians, not only those baptized in our churches." He said, "We are 170 million Nigerians, roughly half are Christians from different denominations and half are Muslims, also of different groups. Catholics are still the largest single-faith group in the country, so we have considerable influence and responsibility." ➤



Storm clouds over Church of the Holy Trinity in Onitsha, Nigeria.



Cardinal Onaiyekan.



Bishop Kukah.

## Nigerian pastor urges persecuted Christians: Be strong in the Lord

KASSA, Nigeria (AllAfrica) – Christ followers in the Nigeria's North have been admonished to be steadfast in the Lord and not to allow the insecurity and uncertainty that Christians in the country are facing to "rob them of God's place in their hearts."

Pastor Enoch Adeboye, general overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), was speaking at the close of the 2013 Northern Ministers and Workers Conference of the Church at Redemption Camp, Kassa, Plateau State, on May 12. He told fellow Nigerian believers that "on no account" should they allow that insecurity to separate them from God.

Adeboye said, "Whenever a man is separated from God, he becomes exposed to terrible things, because his enemies take advantage of that to wreak havoc. So don't allow the situation in the North to take away your salvation. If they take everything you have and they can't take away Christ from you, you are alright."

### God-erected firewall

He continued, "When you are with God, he will build a wall of fire around you, but

when a man allows himself to be separated from God, the devil will take control of the fellow, so you need to be resolute and be more determined to serve God."

Adeboye, who had earlier recounted his church's ordeal in the North, said that 48 of the parishes in his denomination were destroyed in the 2011 post-election violence. But, he declared, that things will be well with Plateau State and Nigeria as a whole.

Taking his text from Exodus 15:11, Adeboye said that when the Almighty God visits, he changes people's destinies, he delivers the oppressed, and brings light into the lives of those in darkness. And he answers those who trust him, making the impossible possible.

Adeboye, however, warned against pride. He reminded his listeners that God can turn a king to an animal if he wants to teach him a lesson, like Nebuchadnezzar who was turned into an animal for seven years because of pride. Adeboye admonished Christians and those in leadership positions to learn from the fall of Nebuchadnezzar and reverence God in whatever position they find themselves. ➤



## Columns

## Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



## In honour of Lloyd Schreurs



I've never met Prince Harry. Nor a single movie star. I've never met Wayne Gretzky. Nor a single President of the United States. But I have met Lloyd Schreurs.

Just recently, there was a funeral for Lloyd Schreurs (we pronounced his last name "skroos" to rhyme with "spruce"). Lloyd Schreurs and his sisters, Harriet and Muriel, operated a 60-acre farm near Cedar Grove, Wisconsin.

Lloyd was a full-time farmer. His sisters worked at "day jobs" and also on the farm. The three lived a very simple life, working and volunteering – especially in church – and being good neighbours.

Lloyd Schreurs, bent over by hard work, speaks to me and everyone else with back trouble or sciatica. Life was not easy for him. The Schreurs farm was largely a "tame" farm, rather intensively managed. I expect that there wasn't a nitrate molecule on the farm that Lloyd didn't know by first name. Perhaps because of the limited land base, every acre was utilized. Maybe that's why one of the last remaining hickory trees in the area – right in the middle of one of his fields – was so notable. That tree, alas, has now blown over. The farm was lush in the summer but bare all winter. Those sixty acres provided food for the Schreurs family and many others through regular agricultural, economic channels.

The Schreurs family attended our church, the one I grew up in. We sometimes sang for the "old folks" with our young peoples' group. When old Albert Schreurs was alive he would sit by the window and look at the cars along the country roads. When we drove by – hunting or checking our muskrats traps – we always had to wave to him and my dad would say, "Morning, Albert." Although we rarely socialized, the Schreurs family was important to us. Muriel, I remember, worked for a while at the grocery store and once followed me almost all the way home to return a dime in change that I had left on the counter. Much later, she sent me a collection of her poems which we published. Harriet (and maybe Muriel, too) was my Sunday school teacher.

Lloyd Schreurs farmed 60 acres after everyone said you couldn't make a living doing it. His sister wrote this poem (see below) as a tribute and eulogy. In my opinion, the poem captures a Christian view of labour, land and creation. Like his sisters, I wish to honour the life of this man – Lloyd Schreurs, one of whom the Dutch called the *kleine luyden* (the little people), the people often forgotten by mass media but loved by our Lord. If you wish to name-drop, mentioning important people you have known, I'll perhaps be impressed, but only if you include Lloyd Schreurs at the top of the list.

## Only a Farmer?

He was only a farmer, is that what you say?  
He was only a farmer we buried today.  
He was only a farmer who tilled the land  
With muscled arm and calloused hand.  
Long were the hours he laboured and sweat,  
Tedious the hours and lonely, and yet,  
To a farmer who knows and loves the land,  
There's a feeling of purpose you don't understand.  
In summer and winter, in cold and in heat,  
He laboured and worked that the world might eat.  
He would go to the barn when the world was asleep,  
The cattle to feed, to tend, and to keep.  
He was only a farmer whose body now lies  
On the side of the hills, 'neath the blue of the skies.  
He was only a farmer, but don't you know  
How man was formed so long ago?  
That man was conceived in the womb of the sod,  
Molded and formed by the finger of God,  
To tend the earth when the world was new.  
That was the task he was given to do.  
This muscled arm and calloused hand,  
Which worked the clay and the dusty sand  
Are now at rest 'neath the clods of sod,  
But his spirit rests in the arms of God.  
Only a farmer who's taken his place  
In the garden of Heaven beholding God's face.  
Dust to dust and clay to clay.  
It was only a farmer we buried today. ✂

– Muriel Schreurs

Curt Gesch (cgesch63@gmail.com) lives in Quick, B.C.

## Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



## The lost art of servanthood



Dear sisters, dear spiritual mothers and daughters and midwives and stay at home mamas;

Dear women pastors and elders and janitors and lawyers and teachers and artists, I celebrate us. I think this is obvious from articles I've written before.

But I fear for us too. I fear we've lost the art of servanthood.

The other day my husband asked me to make nachos with him. To stand at the counter and cut onions for him, while he prepared the cheese and the chips and I was picking up books our children had strewn across the floor and I snapped.

"I am not your servant!" I cried.

I am not your servant.

All he wanted was for me to cut some onions for him. And everything in me defied him.

And in that moment, I was reminded of something my mother had told me when I was 17:

"You're going to find it hard to get married because you're not able to submit."

And, being the rebel that I was, I had wanted to tell her, "That's because you've never taught me how."

My dad was a pastor but when I was a little girl, the church was the only place he was a leader. At home, my mum made the rules. She told my dad when to punish us; my dad would always tell us to go to our mum when we asked for permission, and she ultimately made any decisions affecting the family.

And my dad let her. So I not only didn't fully respect my dad growing up, because he didn't stand up to my mum, but I didn't really trust him to protect me. To come to my rescue if I needed him to. And when I first got married I treated my husband the same way; I bossed him around and got annoyed when he wouldn't listen to me.

My mum's mum was that way too. My Nanny and her husband divorced, because he couldn't please her, and in the end – for so many terrible reasons, not getting her way among them – she committed suicide. I come from a long line of willful women.

But I'm made from my husband's rib.



*I come from a long line of willful women.  
But I am made from my husband's rib.*

## A larger purpose

When God says, "Let us make mankind in our own image; male and female he created them," there are two different Hebrew words used to denote gender. *Zakar* is used for male and *Nequebah* for female. *Zakar* means "a call to remembrance or to worship," the Lord God who saved him. *Nequebah*, the Hebrew word for female, literally means "punctured, bored through."

Author Larry Crabb says that *nequebah* means "to be opened while arranging yourself consistently for a larger purpose than you."

I think about this as I smooth back the hair from my sons' foreheads. I think about how God whispered "tender-hearted leader" over my eldest, and "courageous warrior" over my youngest.

And my greatest prayer for them is that they remember what Jesus Christ – a man who submitted to his heavenly Father – did for them, so they will, in turn, die for the earth and its people.

And my greatest prayer for myself, and for my sons' wives, is that we be open to serving a purpose larger than ourselves.

I fear for us, sisters. I fear we've become too angry to serve, to be opened up to a larger purpose.

My mum used to be the leader in our home. She had been hurt by my father (emotionally), and so she found it hard to submit to him.

But then she got brain cancer and suddenly she needed my dad. And he delighted in being needed. In being given a second chance.

For all of my dad's sermons the greatest message he ever gave (and continues to give) was with his life, bent over the bathtub, washing my mum as she lay semi-unconscious; cutting her toenails, changing her Depends and cooking baked potatoes in the microwave night after night for supper, for years.

And suddenly Mum began to laugh at his jokes and lean on his arm and tell him he was handsome. And suddenly my dad's shoulders straightened and his home became his ministry. And his children rose up and championed him, and called their mother blessed.

When we stop being afraid of what men can do to us, or angry about what they have done, and start serving the God whose image they are made in, then men will start filling our church pews again.

And our husbands will rise up to their full potential to be spiritual leaders, to be prophets and priests of integrity and Pentecost, to be speakers into lives and providers of families and protectors of daughters and mentors of sons.

I celebrate us, sisters.

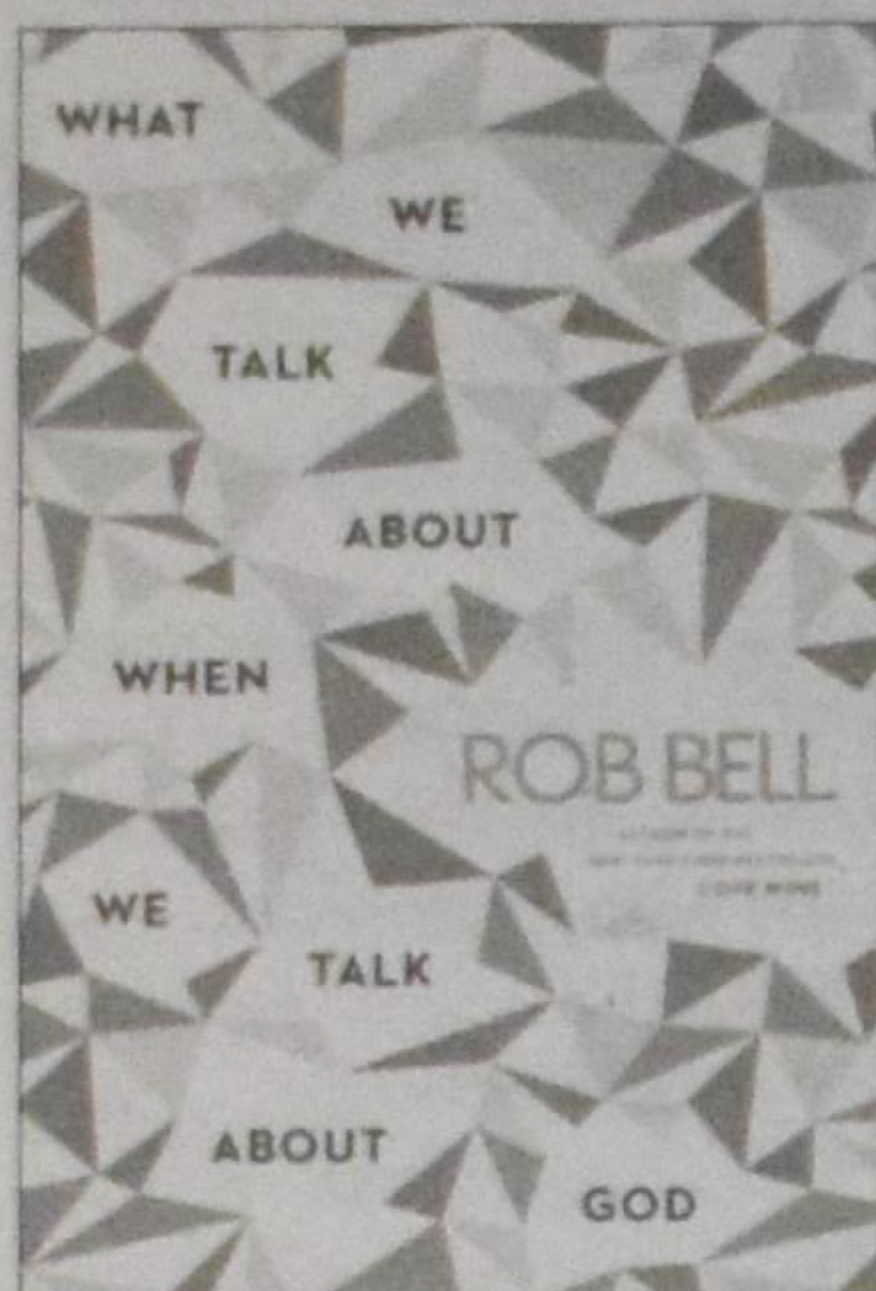
Not because of our gender.

But because of one man, and what he did for us. ✂

Emily Wierenga is an author living in Neerlandia, Alta. For more info please visit [emilywierenga.com](http://emilywierenga.com).



## Reviews



**What We Talk About When We Talk About God**  
by Rob Bell  
Harper One, 2013.

You may sense a mote of bitterness in his new work, but by and large, it seems the criticism hasn't negatively affected his prose, which is as full of good humour and compassion as ever. His latest offering is *What We Talk About When We Talk About God*, published in March by Harper One. It's an audacious topic, especially for a writer who's been criticized for being a little too breezy and vague when it comes to weighty matters like doctrine and systematic theology.

Bell's light touch is actually quite welcome in this sort of conversation, however. Some of his ardent evangelical peers use theology as if it's a closed system, one that brooks no mystery, and gives little space for nuance and complexity. Their love of theology is commendable, of course, but when it's used to dismiss others, or set up clean categories

## God with us, for us, ahead of us

**Brian Bork**

You might remember Rob Bell as the charismatic preaching Michigander who set off a brouhaha in evangelical circles a few years back with *Love Wins*, his book that explored heaven, hell and the fate of every person who ever lived. A clump of evangelical commentators got bent out of shape over Bell's ostensible denial of the traditional doctrine of hell (whatever that is), and took to Twitter to publicly excoriate the heresy.

of who's on the right and wrong side of orthodoxy it becomes more fatuous than profound.

Perhaps that goes to show just what a risky business God-talk is. Yet the world hums with divine presence, as Bell points out, and we must continue to speak. So then, how should we talk when we talk about God? Bell sets out five adjectives to help us speak of the divine: "Open," "Both," "With," "For" and "Ahead."

The first two adjectives shape the conversation itself. We need to be "open" because the universe is a weird place; things we think impossible or paradoxical are happening all the time, and that should give us pause if we think we can cordon off the debate at any particular point. Bell frames the necessity of openness as a riposte to the disenchanted thinking that undergirds secularism and the sort of scientific worldview that precludes any talk of the supernatural or the divine. "When people object to the idea of God, to the idea that there is more beyond our tangible, provable-with-hard-evidence observation and experiences of the world, they aren't taking the entire world into account."

To keep the conversation "open," we need to remain aware of "both" what we are saying about God, and how we are saying it. That means making use of the breadth of human language, whether it be technical description or metaphor, while realizing there will always be something inadequate in even the most refined theology or poetry.

Then comes "with," which is the adjective that describes that hum of divine presence; God is everywhere and that means we can experience him. And that experience comes in two ways: God is "for" us, a fact made most evident in

the life of Jesus, and God is "ahead" of us, leading us forward into "greater peace, love, justice, connection, honesty, compassion and joy."

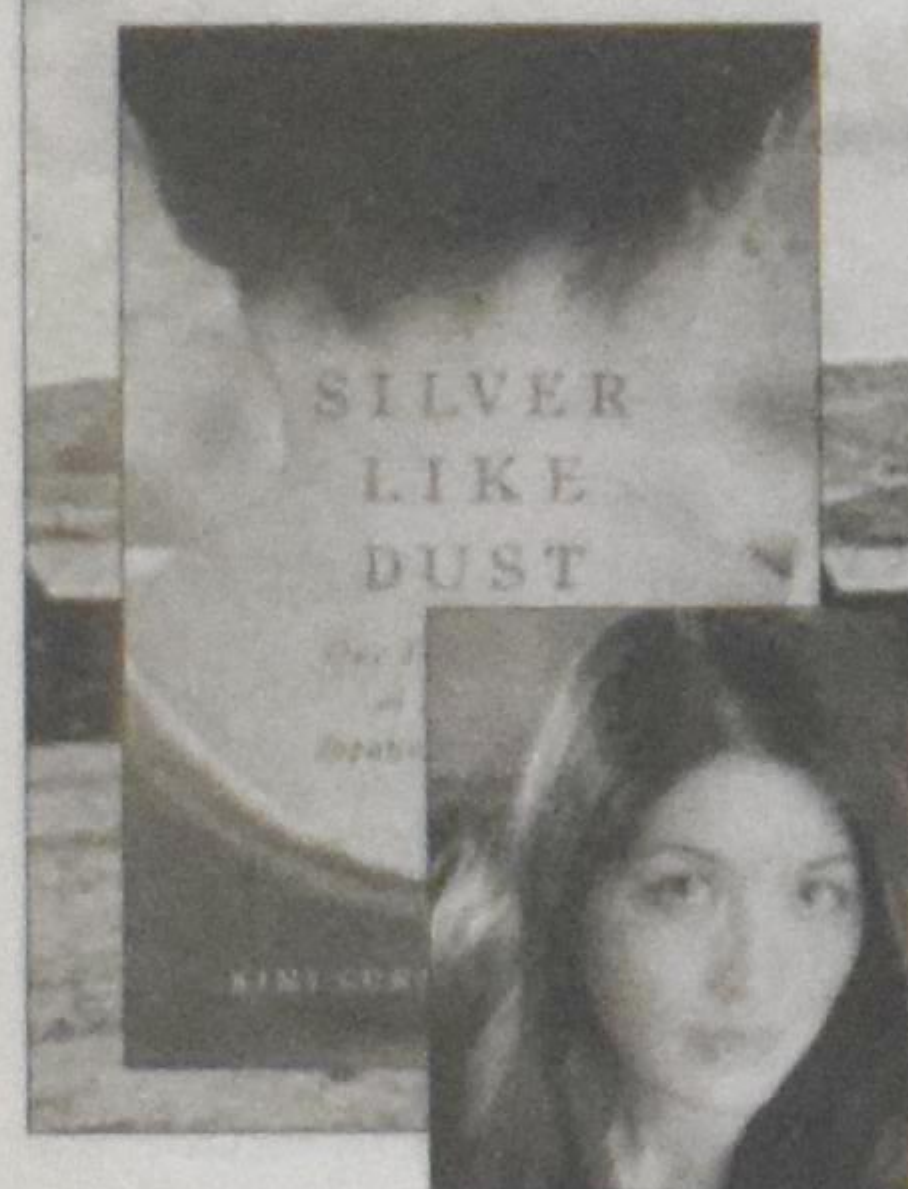
This book brings good news, even if it's admittedly short on a few key theological concepts. I'm sure some reviewers will deride its lack of theological rigor, as they always seem to. They'll wonder where his atonement theory is, why he's not talking about election, or exploring theologies of confession, judgment or what have you.

But that'd mean they're missing out on what Bell has set out to do. This isn't a fully developed theology of Christ and salvation. It's a salvo from a man who sees a culture rejecting the story he holds dearly, and he wants to win them back with graciousness, humility and generosity. *What We Talk About When We Talk About God* articulates the Christian story for an increasingly secular and jaded populace, one that's harbouring some pretty cynical attitudes about organized Christianity. And, for the most part, it acquits itself marvelously. It's a sensitive and savvy resuscitation of the Christian understanding of God for the modern era, the sort of book you could hand to your neighbour or your daughter's T-ball coach, if you'd like to give them a glimpse of what you talk about when you talk about God. Believers may appreciate it too, for its freshness, but also for the always-welcome reminder of the "presence in all of life of the God who is with us, for us and ahead of us."

Brian Bork is CC's Review Editor and a CRC Chaplain at the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University.



## Shame in the shadows of the past



**Silver Like Dust: One Family's Story of America's Japanese Internment**  
by Kimi Cunningham Grant  
Pegasus Books, 2012.

ture, dim and indistinct." When Grant — born to a Japanese American mother and a Caucasian father — was eight-years-old, her mother told her that her own parents had spent nearly three years in a concentration camp. Frightened by her mother's furtive and apologetic revelation, Grant didn't dare ask any questions about this seemingly dark family secret.

Growing up, Grant struggled with her biracial identity, shunning all things Japanese to emphasize that she was an American. Looking back, she realized that she had been "oblivious to the fact that in all my efforts to be un-Japanese, I was joining that same old — and very Japanese — narrative of haji, or shame, that my mother had been participating in when she'd whispered her secret about my grandparents. The same one that had kept my family silent about those years in a Wyoming prison camp."

**Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

Kimi Grant's Japanese American grandmother was a mystery to her — "a shadow slipping among bodies; a set of hands; a background fixture,

In her late teens and early twenties, Grant's attitude changed. She wanted to know what it had been like for her grandmother (Obaachan) and grandfather (Ojichan), along with approximately 112,000 other Japanese Americans, to be imprisoned in 10 concentration camps throughout the United States. (Only Japanese Americans from the West Coast were displaced and interned. Those living inland and on the East Coast were not evicted from their communities because, due to their location, the United States government believed they posed no imminent threat to national security).

Though Japanese Americans had always faced discrimination — whites-only beaches and "JAPS KEEP OUT" signs just two of many ways it manifested itself — hatred and fear of the "yellow peril" had escalated after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. On April 7, 1942, 20-year-old Obaachan and her family were forced to leave their Los Angeles home and community. The family was first sent to Pomona Fairgrounds, thirty miles west of Los Angeles. They were forced to live in stables hastily renovated into shoddy enclosures called apartments while the permanent camp at Heart Mountain in Wyoming was being prepared. It was at

Pomona Fairground that Grant's grandparents met each other. They married later when both were sent to Heart Mountain.

Particularly enlightening is Grant's exploration of *shikatanagai*, a quality evidenced in many Japanese Americans. Obaachan explained what it meant: "It's a way of thinking. It's a saying that all Japanese told each other when something unfair was happening, like the laws, or the headlines that said that everyone was a spy or that we were all sneaks. Even in the concentration camp, people would shrug their shoulders and say 'Shikatanagai'." All her life, Obaachan had been taught to accept what came her way, even if it was unjust. *Shikatanagai* was a cultural expression of that teaching.

Many Japanese Americans at that time "wished to demonstrate their patriotism to the United States" even if it meant losing jobs, being drafted into the army or being displaced and forced to live in a concentration camp with meagre resources, inadequate nutrition, censored mail and unjust wages for forced employment. Grant, the product of another generation and a world shaped by the civil rights movement, struggles to understand "this painful sense of duty and devotion." Yet she hesitates to share that feeling with Obaachan, not wishing to create a wedge between herself and the grandmother she is finally getting to know and love.

Grant best sums up the experience of interned Japanese Americans when she declares it "Such a waste of life." The United States government might have reached the same conclusion when on August 10, 1988, President Ronald Reagan declared: "For these fundamental violations of the basic civil liberties and constitutional rights of these individuals of Japanese ancestry, we apologize on behalf of the Nation."

Still, an apology can't ever eradicate the sense of shame and emotional pain that people live with for a lifetime, and pass down to their children, after their rights have been violated. Grant's thought-provoking book is a stark reminder of that reality.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyafv55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.





## Features

## AUBADE

O, this morning, not a cloud in the sky, and coffee, black, the way I like it. I have been watching a phoebe, dark hood and wagtail bobbing, as he flits back and forth from the beauty bush to the eave of the shed, just yards from this red Adirondack chair where I'm sitting, breathing the day through my skin. It rained last night, and the chair's damp slats are cool on my back; there's a scree of frogs in the swamp, a creek of sound in the background, a river of desire: *Here I am. Find me.* Felicitous. That's the only word to describe this. The sun pours warm honey from its great glass jar, no matter how little we deserve it. Some of us drag a heavy load through the day, a sack of should of's, or push a bushel of sorrow up a hill. But there's the phoebe coming back with his bit of straw or broken twig. He has a job to do, and he sticks with it. And then he opens his beak and sings.

## ORIENTAL POPPIES

Georgia O'Keeffe, 1928  
— for my mother

Lit matches struck in the dark, road-flares burning, these poppies smolder by the bird bath where we brought my mother's ashes when her life wickered out. Each flower is splotched with black, night at the heart of burning day. Light shines through the petals, translucent as skin. At the end, her bones shone through, the skeleton wanting to dance. The poppies' orange tango, a wild fandango with the wind. Nothing in English rhymes with this color, not porridge, not ordinary, not original. We only have one mother. Reach for a blossom, twirl it in your fingers, a dancer on an unlit stage. Every gardener knows about loss: thinning, pruning, the appetite of rabbits, how frost waits in the wings, sharpening his shears.

## PEEPS

In those last few months my mother didn't want to eat, this woman who made everything from scratch, and who said of her appetite, *I eat like a bricklayer*. Now she listlessly stirred the food around her plate, sometimes picking up a piece of chicken, then looking at it as if to say, *What is this?* Wouldn't put it in her mouth. But Peeps! Marshmallow Peeps! Spun sugar and air, molded in clever forms: a row of ghosts, a line of pumpkins, a bevy of bunnies, a flock of tiny chicks, sometimes in improbable colors like purple and blue. . . . One day, she turned over her tray, closed her mouth, looked up at me like a defiant child, and said, *I'm not eating this stuff. Where's my Peeps?*

When it was over, the hospice chaplain said some words in my back yard, under the wisteria arch. The air was full of twinkling white butterflies, in love with the wild oregano. Blue-green fronds of Russian sage waved in front of the Star Gazer lilies, and a single finch lit on a pink coneflower, and stayed. When there were no more words or tears, I ripped open the last packet of Peeps, tore their little marshmallow bodies, their sugary blood on my hands, and gave a piece to each of us. It melted, grainy fluff on our tongues, and it was good.

## Serendipity, Peeps, and poetry

Poet Barbara Crooker opens to serendipity in writing and re-imagines the spiritual poem through a popular foamy candy.

I like to think all my writing resides at the intersection of faith and art. My new book, *Gold*, (part of the Poeima Poetry Series, Cascade Books, a division of Wipf and Stock, to be released later this year) deals, in part, with the death of my mother, one of those dark times when everything we believe is called into question. It was a profound journey, and my attempt to write about it points out the gap that always exists between experience and creation, existence and depiction.

In *Peeps*, I was trying to work with what was before me, the given, my mother's love of those sweet marshmallowy treats, the way her face lit up when I found her a new variety. Those last years were difficult, and Peeps were one of her few delights. The poem strives to start there, and to end with Peeps becoming a parallel form of communion at the end of the poem. One of the things that sometimes bothers me with religious/spiritual poetry is that it uses the same old images (the rugged cross, the Easter lily) in the same old way. I'm pretty sure no one's written about communion using purple chickens before.

I'm also a huge believer in serendipity as a means of providing materials for a poem. It is not possible to buy Peeps in the grocery store "out of season," which means after Easter. (Hallowe'en, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and



Dick, Barbara, and David Crooker in St. Petersburg, FL.

Easter are the only Peeps-recognized holidays. I myself think they're missing the mark on turkeys and flags.) So, I turned to the factory (we live near Just Born) to give me a supply, even though I had to buy them through the mail. In the end, I'd overbought, and so had the bittersweet pleasure of distributing Peeps among the people who loved my mother, both near and far (they harden into rocks out of their cellophane wrapper, but survive in the mail just fine).

Serendipity also provided the phoebe, who caught my attention when I was writing outdoors (*en plein air*)

while at an artist colony. One of the jobs of writing is, I think, to wake us up, make us pay attention to the small things of the world that are going on right in front of us, things that we're often too busy to take the time to stop and see. It's also one of our jobs, as writers of faith, to appreciate God's creation. So, in *Aubade*, I was watching the phoebe working on his nest (okay, it's impossible to tell boy from girl in this species, but he "seemed" male to me) right in front of where I was also working with my pen and paper. I tried to listen to what he has to say. Again, words seem to be pretty paltry tools, and nests seem to be much more tangible constructs. Still, despite the distance between the poem in the head and the poem on the page, it always feels good to be working.

This article first appeared online at [reliefjournal.com](http://reliefjournal.com). Barbara Crooker's poems appear in a variety of literary journals, including *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Christian Century*, *Christianity and Literature*, *Sojourners*, *Rock & Sling*, *Ruminate*, *Literature and Belief*, *The Cresset*, and anthologies, including *Imago Dei: Poems from Christianity and Literature*, *Good Poems American Places* (Garrison Keillor, editor), *Looking for God in All the Right Places*, and *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*. She has won a number of awards, including the 2003 Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Prize (Stanley Kunitz, judge) and three Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowships in Literature.



## Features

# Aboreal particulars and what it means to be human

Nick Schuurman

More than twenty years have passed since John Terpstra's *Naked Trees* was first published. I sat down with the poet and cabinetmaker last fall to discuss his recently re-released collection of poems.

As much as it is concerned with the details of physical landscapes, geography is, for Terpstra, a thing of living mystery – a shared and often forgotten history bound up into a place. “Yes,” he told me, “I am interested in nature, but not exclusive of its relationship to human beings.” *Naked Trees*, then, is properly understood as a series of poems about the arboreal particulars of Ontario's Golden Horseshoe, but also about what it means to be human, to belong to a community and to be rooted in centuries of tradition and history.

The following conversation, which took place early in the morning of a particularly windy October day, was recorded in the living room of Terpstra's Hamilton home. It has been divided into two parts, the first, which is concerned with the author's writing process, appears here. Part II, on the topic of landscape and geography, will appear in the July 8th issue of *Christian Courier*.

## Is it strange coming back to work you wrote two decades ago? Is there a sense of disjuncture?

There is a little, there is a little. Part of it is some people have gotten the impression that this is new, and you don't really want to say that it is 20 years old, because it seems a little less fresh.

For the content itself, I was torn. I went through it once and made changes to it, and then let it sit for a little while. And then I went back and thought *I have got to stop this, I have to not tamper with it*. It's funny what happens. It works subtle changes on something that is already a whole, with its flaws. When you are the person who wrote it, then often what you see are the flaws. You see the stuff that you didn't get right. You kind of want to go back and correct it, but you forget that at the time you wrote it, you realized it wasn't perfect, but you were really not able to do anything about it then, so, don't touch.

I was really hoping to add to it, but that's when you realize that the voice you had writing that, once it's done, it's done. That would be hard to replicate.

Reading it, I feel perfectly comfortable reading it again. I don't know if everyone has this experience, but for most of what I've written – with the first book that was published in 1980 or 81 or whenever it was – I have no problem reading those poems now. They are very familiar of course, but they are as immediate to me now as they were then.

## There is a sense of movement, growth and motion in your writing about these objects that would, given a passing glance, otherwise appear static. Does that attentiveness come naturally?

I have a friend in Chicago who is a painter, and who wonders if it is a Dutch thing, like Vermeer creating these fantastic scenes with all this attention to stuff that other people wouldn't notice. That is part of what is going on when I write. That sort of focus on and attention to the here and now, that's just what I do.

Half the time, you're trying to reconcile yourself to who you are and what you do. And how you do it. You see other people do things a different way, and you say, “I would like to do it that way.” You see it, and you're attracted to it, and you would like to do it that way. You consciously and unconsciously want to emulate, and it doesn't work because all you can do is work with what you have, with who you are and how you see things. In my case it happens to be that sort of thing. I can't explain why that is.

Sure, it seems like I actually do sit down and look at trees.

Well that's not really true. I fought long and hard to pay attention. It comes naturally in some ways, but it is also a total inner struggle to do it. I must think it is important for myself to do that, otherwise why would I do it? There's a wonder behind it – and I don't want to sound facile – that I just want to explore. There's a wonder behind it that I don't want to lose.

## You play with another metaphor, this sense in which trees are rooted in one place, witnessing and bearing witness to long spans of time. Staying put in one place, what have you seen that you might have otherwise missed if you were just passing through?

I am not a native Hamiltonian. My parents moved here with my family in the late 60s. I was here for high school and then left, and came back in the late 70s, and we've lived here since. It's a good chunk of time, but I meet a lot of people who were born and raised here, the product of many generations here, and so I sometimes feel like I am just an outsider.

It's a funny city. When we first came here, it was known as the steel city and it was belching forth. And I learned later that the early 70s were the time when the lion's share of the landfill went into the bay to make those steel companies bigger. In the early 80s it all started slowing down. And so we've seen this trajectory, from the great steel-making age – with all the other manufacturing that went along with it – into this thing where now the city can't define itself as primarily manufacturing anymore.

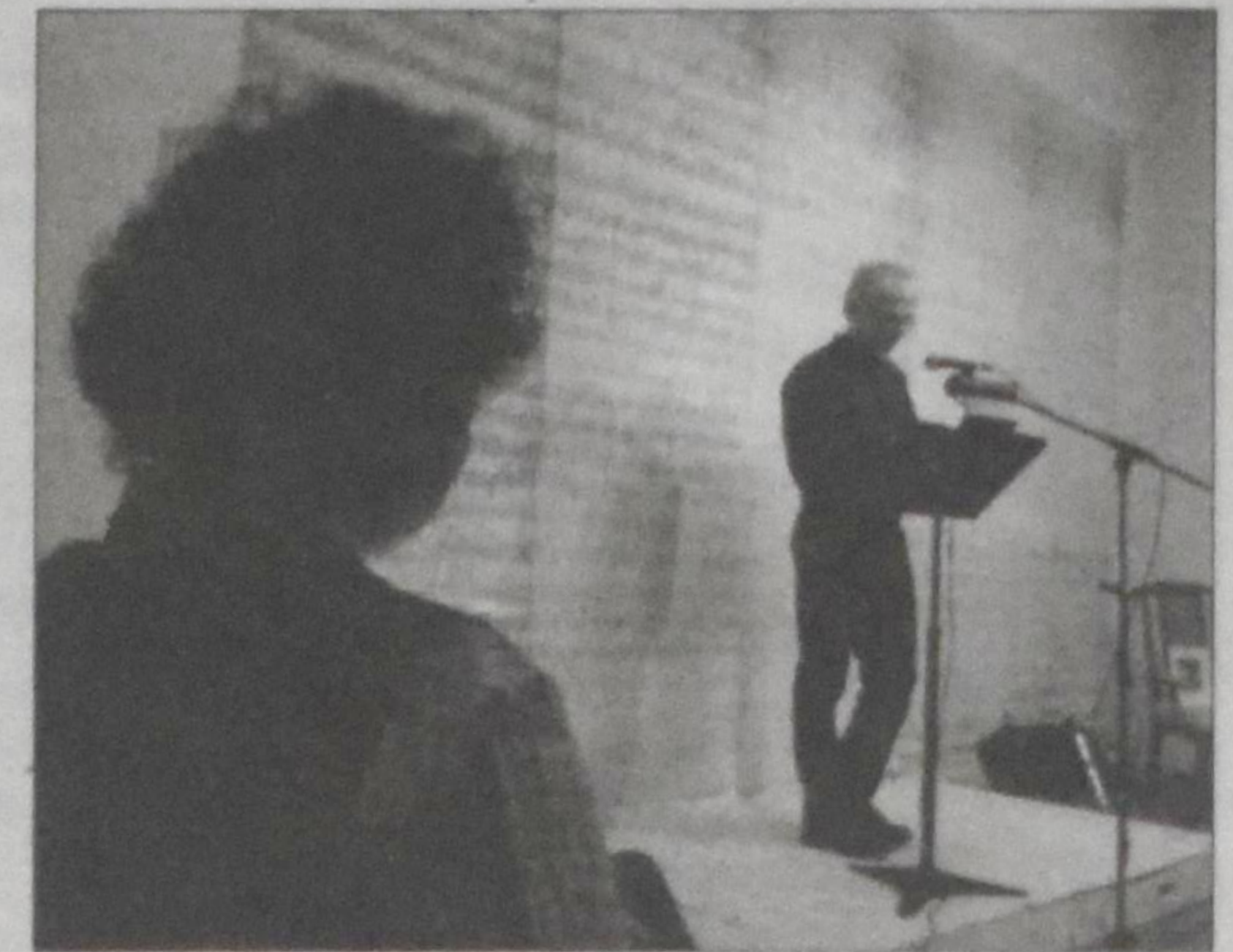
It's had an effect on nearly everything. The city has lots of social service needs, and it's had lots of poverty, and it doesn't have a lot of money, unlike our next door neighbours in Burlington or Oakville. And money draws money, and social services draws more social services.

At the same time, it hasn't all been that, because McMaster has grown, especially with the medical centre. So now that's the major employer, which is how it is for many cities. It is basically tax dollars that are creating the economy, particularly hospitals and education, which is sort of weird. I don't know how long that can be maintained. You get a sense of big wheels turning.

I am comfortable with the idea that this city does not have a lot of money. I am all for a glamour-free society. If we don't have that kind of stuff, I am totally OK with it, I prefer it in fact. Now that things have started to happen on James St. or Locke St, the unfortunate next step will be that you'll get a chain coming there, buying something, and revamping it and glamorizing the place. If it's going to happen, there's not a lot you can do about it, but I like it the way it is now.

I like the kind of development that is going on now, that is not city-promoted. It is a new thing and it is a really neat thing, and there are people who are attracted to the city for those reasons, which I think are great. A bunch of them are reading *Falling into Place* because my friend Dave is selling them out of his store, which is great, because that kind of thing that I was trying to do with that book seems to resonate with those people. When you're writing a book, you have no idea if anybody's going to pay attention to it, or have the same kinds of world and life views or feelings for the place as you do, and it seems that they do. That sort of thing is really relatively new, because when I was working on that book, it felt lonely.

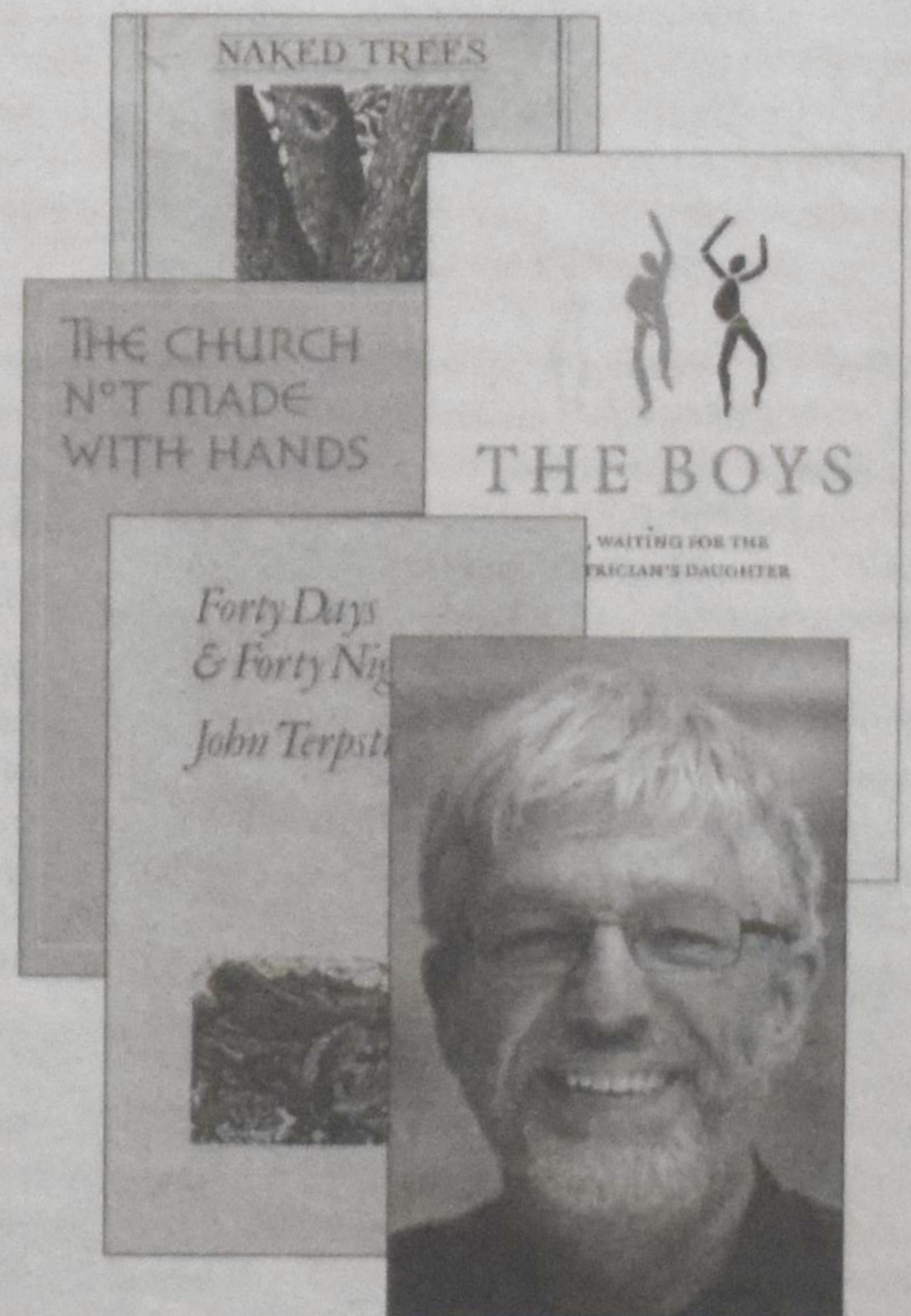
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John Terpstra reading at WordsAloud in Durham, Ont., on Nov. 4, 2012.

Naked trees extend their complicated praise  
branches sway, in  
a sort of unison  
not agreed upon  
each their own way  
to the one wind  
die down, as the wind dies  
Dendritic limbs converge  
chute to common ground  
column down to earth  
It is this trunk  
which stands between its own two extremes  
Out of sight  
roots are gripped in unanimity  
break surface with singleness of mind, which  
ten feet up  
begins to subdivide

(From the Introduction, p. 8)





## Features

## Holy Spirit, holy church

Peter Hoytema

The adjective *holy* appears three times in the Apostles' Creed – twice in reference to the Spirit, and once in reference to the church. In more than 20 years as a pastor, I don't recall a single occasion when I or other church leaders debated whether the Spirit is holy or not. We didn't need to. Everyone believed in the Holy Spirit. But the holiness of the church has been another matter. The word *holy*, uncontested when applied to the Spirit, has been the subject of considerable scrutiny when applied to the church. Why is that? The short answer is because God is holy and we are not. So while there is nothing within the nature of God that contradicts God's holiness, there is much in the church that calls its holiness into question.

But more must be said about this, especially as it relates to the variety of ways that unholiness marks the church.

Most often, the technical point of the church's holiness is not explored directly. It is assumed and cherished as a gift. But there are a number of ways in which the church's holiness gets addressed in more roundabout way. It happens, for example, when individuals express disagreement with decisions made by church leaders. Often, it is the legitimacy (i.e. holiness) of those decisions or the process involved in making them that is challenged. Or consider the typical church's level of interest in reaching out to its community. Is it not true that some of a church's lack of passion in community outreach stems from an unexpressed but widely held concern that a church's respectability (i.e. holiness)

will be diluted by the inclusion of those often called "outsiders"? Or consider churches where holiness is equated with consensus on doctrinal or practical issues. Here, considerable and ongoing effort is invested in discussing holiness in the church because the word *holy* must be carefully protected, specifically defined and universally accepted.

My point in writing this article is not to discourage reflections on holiness within church communities. We need more, not less of this! But if we are going to explore the subject of holiness in the church we must do so as those who have been transformed by the Holy Spirit and who understand that without the Holy Spirit's empowerment and ongoing renewal there can be no genuine holiness in the church.

What I am getting at specifically is the power of the Holy Spirit to liberate us from the tyranny of what the New Testament calls the "flesh." The flesh (sometimes translated as "sinful nature") is a sum term denoting the power of sin. The flesh represents every inclination that is hostile to God, and is aptly described in Gal. 5:17 as being "contrary to the Spirit." Many people wrongly presume that sins of the flesh are exclusively physical in nature, but, as Paul's inventory in Gal. 5:19-21 indicates, the flesh includes sins that are spiritual too (e.g. jealousy, envy, selfish ambition). C.S. Lewis contended that spiritual sins are worse than physical sins, famously claiming in *Mere Christianity* that "a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute," before conceding "but, of course, it is better to be neither."

This is an important point because it affirms the power the flesh wields over everyone, including those who seem religiously upright. Just read Phil. 3:1-6 where Paul describes his pre-Christian religious devotion for confirmation of that. As a zealous Pharisee, Paul's passion for

righteousness was unparalleled, and he was undoubtedly regarded by many as holy. But none of it was of the Spirit. In his words, it was all "confidence in the flesh."

## A holy church only by way of the Holy Spirit

This is why our reflections on holiness in the church require deep and consistent interaction with the Holy Spirit, by whose filling we are equipped to resist both obvious and subtle entrapments of the flesh. What does this mean in very practical terms? Two things: (a) the Holy Spirit must shape the way people understand the church, and (b) the Holy Spirit must shape the way the church understands people.

(a) When it comes to pointing out all that's wrong with the church, there is no shortage of evidence available. But despite its flaws, the church is a central mechanism for the revelation of God's glory in the world. It serves this

function strictly by God's appointment, which means the church's failures stand as a powerful testimony to the gracious and longsuffering purposes of God. For some mysterious reason, God chooses unholy people to put his own holiness on display. That means that even when the church fails miserably to live up to its calling, something of God's healing presence is always evident. When we consider the church, particularly when it has disappointed us, it is God's relentless grace and not what the church makes of it that must be our ultimate landing point.

Perhaps an illustration will help. Recently, in certain regions here in Ontario, some who entered a hospital for medical care were impacted by circumstances that

directly contradict a hospital's mission to promote health and healing. Some were exposed to *C. difficile*, an imposing superbug. Others received chemotherapy drugs that had been inexplicably watered down. All were told to change into what is commonly called a gown, an incredibly charitable name given how insubstantial it is (Lutheran pastor, Peter Marty, once noted the similarity between wearing a hospital gown and studying one's medical benefits. In both cases, every time one turns around there is something else lacking coverage).

The point is, despite the fact that a hospital is sometimes beset by realities that are contrary to its purpose, it is still a place we want to go if medical attention is required. All that a hospital is supposed to be is given precedence over the unfortunate reality of what it sometimes is. Replace the word "hospital" with "church" in that sentence and you'll have as good a description of the church as you will find. When it comes to populating the church, the Holy Spirit has nothing but unholy people to work with. Any assessment of the church, not

to mention the level of our own humility, is greatly helped by that understanding.

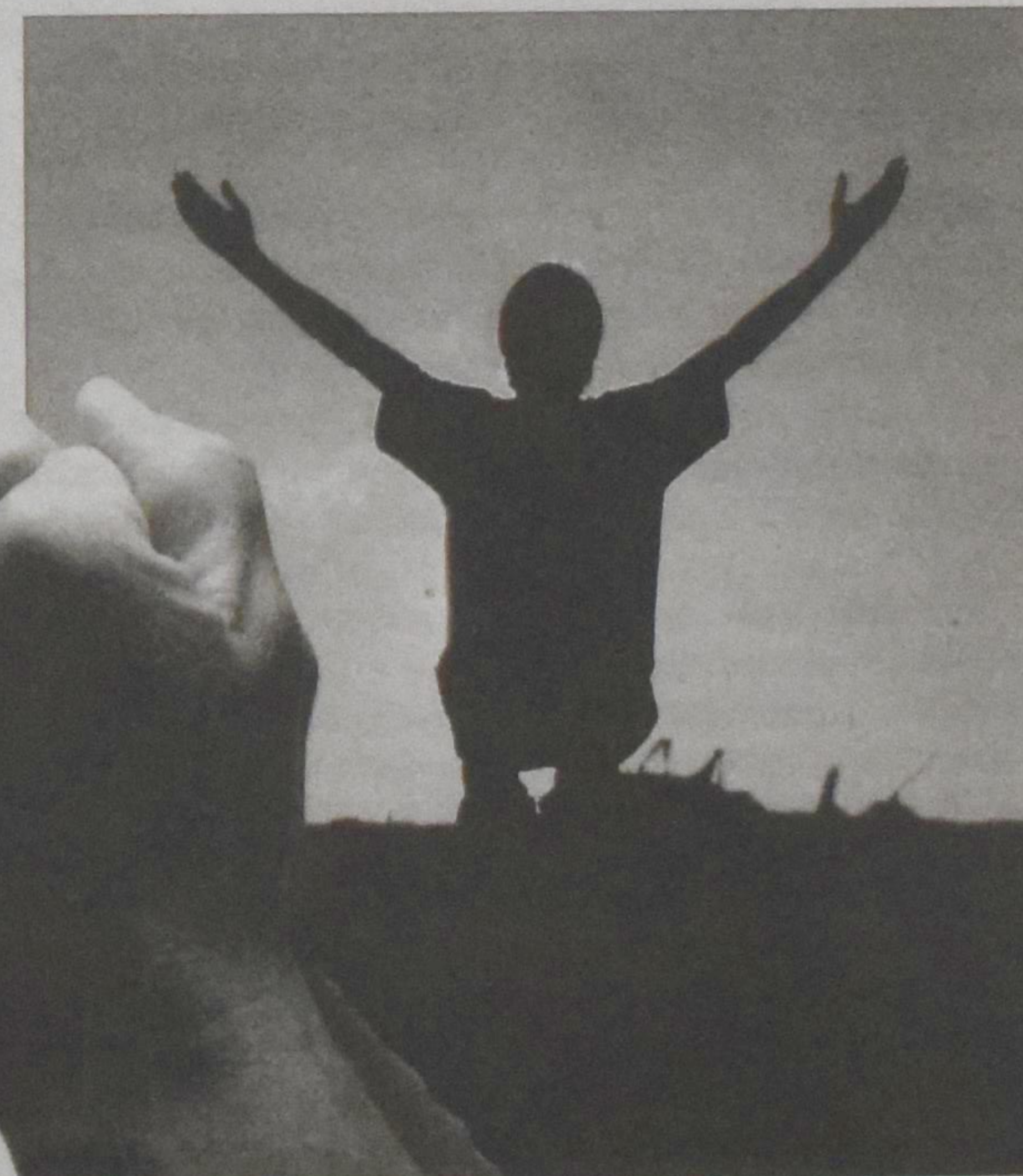
(b) This is why the way the church understands people also requires the Holy Spirit's guidance. When it comes to diagnosing the tyranny of the flesh it is imperative that the full spectrum of its power, which is at work in those we consider "righteous" and "unrighteous," is considered. The tendency of those who claim holiness is to focus on all that is perceived as unholy in others. The sinful nature exerts its dominance over the righteous in exactly this way – by leading them to think that it is only the unrighteous that are under its power. But the power of the flesh is not just evident in all that the church regards as unholy. It also corrupts our very understanding of goodness.

## God's power manifested in a community of sinners

Only the Holy Spirit can give us the discernment we need to correctly parse the ways sin is at work both in what we consider good as well as evil. Only the Holy Spirit can lead us to a clearer understanding of ourselves and others, all of whom have the same tyrannical sinful nature that needs to be conquered. To cite just one application of this principle, might the seemingly endless discussions about what it means to participate in the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner not be greatly helped if the insistence upon self-examination would focus on just that: *self-examination*?

Imagine how much more attractive God's gracious invitations would sound if the holy church would submit more to the Holy Spirit. The church would then resemble what Lesslie Newbigin once described as the place where "Jesus is made present here and now so that all people, righteous and unrighteous, are enabled to taste and share the love of God before whom all are unrighteous and all are accepted as righteous . . . the place where the power of God is manifested in a community of sinners" (*The Open Secret*, p. 60). Come, Holy Spirit, and make us holy!

Peter Hoytema is pastor of Westmount CRC in Strathroy, Ont.





## Columns

## From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til



## Giuseppe Verdi and God's mysterious, troubling way

"God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform," English poet-hymnwriter William Cowper reflected in 1774. Cowper's observation is profoundly biblical. Look around; you will see it!

I've thought recently about God's mysterious way – his singular, lavish, sometimes troubling grace – as I participated with Chorus Niagara in rehearsals and then a performance of the *Requiem* by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901).

A requiem is the centuries-old Mass for, or of, the Dead. In the late 18th century, musical requiem settings began to be heard in concert halls rather than church funerals (think of Mozart's unfinished masterwork). And Verdi's 1874 *Requiem* for four soloists, double choir and large orchestra is the pinnacle of the genre. His setting is so dramatic and intense – he wrote primarily opera, after all – that even in Italy's 19th century concert halls it caused controversy. (There were women in the chorus!)

Unlike the regular mass, the Latin requiem has no *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. Added is the *Dies irae* ("Day of Wrath"), which tells of the Judgment, and appeals to Christ for mercy. Also added are the *Requiescant in pace* ("May they rest in peace") and *In Paradisum* ("May angels lead you to Paradise").

Composers have been writing requiems for centuries, so why muse on God's mysterious doings in relation to Verdi's *Requiem*? It is at once a beautiful and distressing story, peculiar to Verdi yet not unique in music history. Thoroughly Italian, with a life spanning most of the 19th century, Verdi was steeped in Roman Catholicism. But whatever early faith he had waned; he was troubled by nominal Catholicism and some less than stellar examples of priestly faith. He drifted into agnosticism. Later, the great conductor Toscanini referred to him as an atheist.

Verdi's second wife, Giuseppina, herself a Catholic, said this of him: "He is a jewel among honest men; he understands and feels himself every delicate and elevated sentiment. And yet this brigand permits himself to be, I won't say an atheist, but certainly very little of a believer, and that with an obstinacy and calm that make me want to beat him. I exhaust myself in speaking to him about the marvels of the heavens, the earth, the sea, etc. It's a waste of breath! He laughs in my face and freezes me in the midst of my oratorical periods and my divine enthusiasm by saying, 'You're all crazy,' and unfortunately he says it with good faith" (translated from the Italian).

### Atheist fixated on judgment?

This is especially where God's mysterious way comes in. How could, why would, God allow an unbeliever like Verdi to write this profound work that pleads with Jesus, "King of Glory, King of Dreadful Majesty," to be merciful to us sinners? That reminds Jesus of why he suffered for us; that asks for a place among the sheep, not the goats; that begs for mercy in the face of the Day of Wrath "that will dissolve the world in ashes"?

There is a strange, almost inordinate fixation by Verdi on that Day of Wrath. His *Dies irae* is chilling. His depiction of the "awful trumpet" that will accom-



The bust of a Verdi that stands on a column in Buffalo's Delaware Park cemetery.

pany the rising of the dead and Christ's return as Judge is the kind of musical-spiritual combination that stands the hair on back of your neck. And – peculiar to Verdi – the *Dies irae* occurs not once or twice, but *three* times. Yet tellingly, he omits the final *In Paradisum*.

Could Verdi not fathom Paradise yet in his deepest heart have a niggling fear he might actually be subject to Judgment some day? Was there a hairline crack in Verdi's hardened heart that oozed the truth that God *is*, after all – and that in that Day "whatever is hidden will be revealed" and "nothing will remain unavenged"?

We can't know. God knows. And God, throughout our history, has been using for his own purposes people like Verdi who ignore or oppose him (there are plenty of biblical examples). It is an unsettling irony that there is much of the Word of God in Verdi's *Requiem*, and God's Word does not return to him void (as Isaiah assures us).

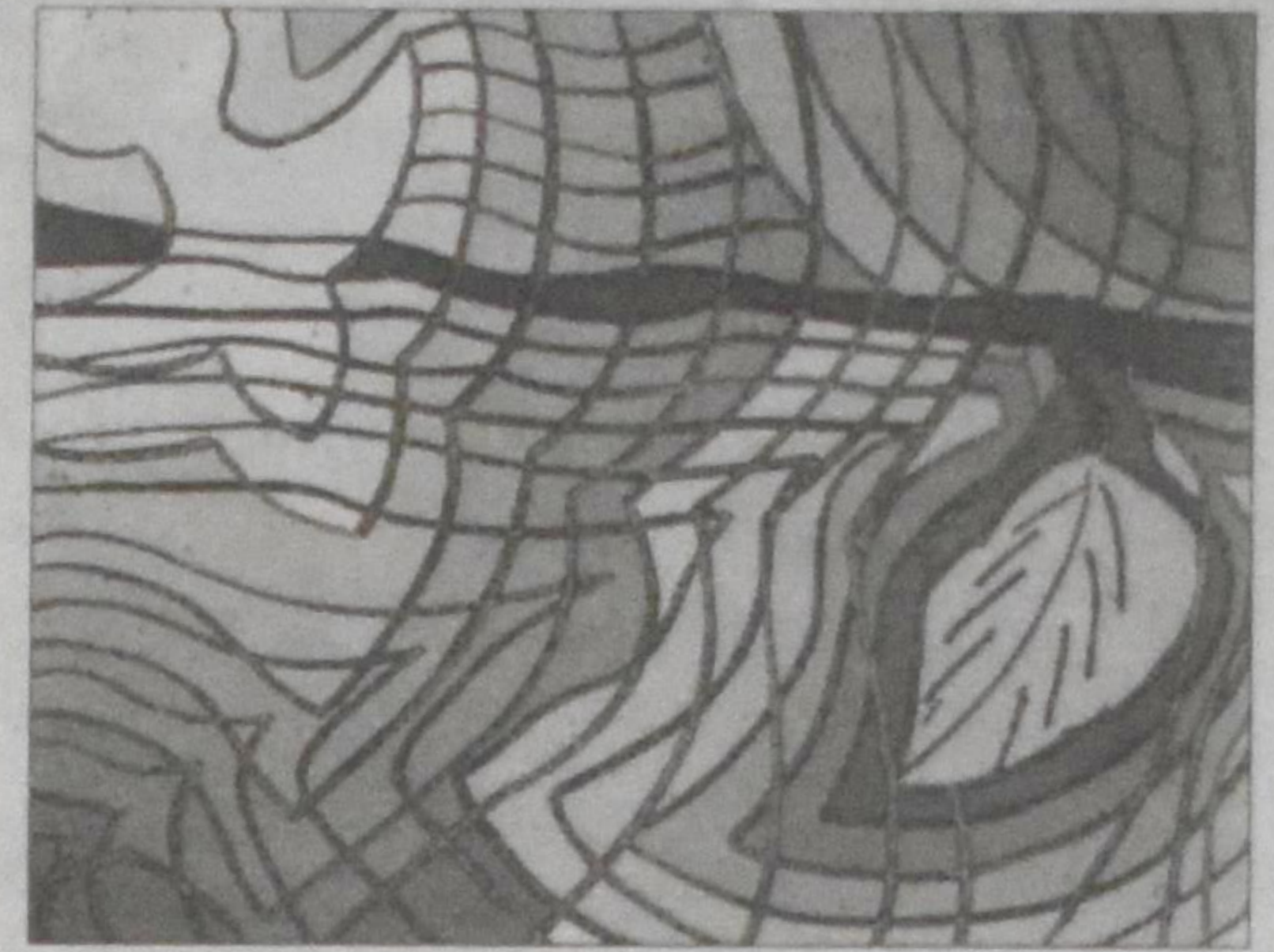
Verdi was not alone among unbelieving composers who have written deeply truthful, even Christ-affirming works. Johannes Brahms was another, and another who wrote a famous Requiem, albeit one from which he deliberately excised all reference to Christ. Twentieth century Britons Benjamin Britten and Ralph Vaughan Williams were yet others.

Yes, God moves in, and has his purpose in, his own mysterious way. Often we mortals do not understand. Thus, in my finiteness I find it tragic that so gifted a composer as Verdi could have simultaneously denied God and written music that reveals great truth about God (and our fallen world).

God's "common grace" is lavish. Perhaps our best response is simply to thank him for the deep enrichment of our world which is its result. And then to remind ourselves, with Abraham, that "the Judge of all the earth will do right." ✂

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, N.Y. She blogs at [ReformedRevelry.wordpress.com](http://ReformedRevelry.wordpress.com).

## ARTFUL EYE



Spirit Catcher Vision, John Stuart.

## The Small Voice

A mighty storm rocked the mountains  
but God was not in the wind.  
A tremendous tremor shook the earth  
but God was not in the earthquake.  
A dazzling fire flashed forth  
but God was not in the fire.  
These all spoke of God's glory  
but God was to be heard  
In the still small voice  
of Jehovah.

Bethlehem's hills echoed the herald angels  
but God was not in the chorus.  
The shepherds shook in their terror  
but God was not in their fear.  
The sky showed a special star  
but God was not in its glow.  
These all spoke of God's presence,  
but God was to be found  
In the still small voice  
of Jesus.

A rushing wind roared through the room  
but God was not in the wind.  
The roof's rafters creaked  
but God was not in their unsettling.  
The fire danced on the disciples' heads  
but God was not in the flames.  
These all spoke of God's power  
but God is to be known  
In the still small voice  
of the Spirit.

Joe Veltman

John Stuart is a Scottish Presbyterian pastor, ministering in East Tennessee. He calls art his creative therapy. Check out his website at [stushieart.com](http://stushieart.com).



Joe Veltman is the pastor at Calvary Community Church, New Berlin, Wis. He enjoys painting, photography and writing poetry.



## Columns

## Ambassador

Thomas Wolthuis



## A Godly bridge

How do you picture an ambassador? To me, "ambassador" is a strange looking word, but I love its meaning and image. I picture bridges, peace negotiations, gift giving, mediations, connections.

In the summer of 2009 I was getting ready to teach for a summer in Ndola, Zambia. I was finishing up the semester teaching Theology at Dordt College, as well as preaching and being a ministry adviser to a new church plant, Living Water Community Church. For some reason I preached on 2 Cor. 5:14-6:2, which includes this verse (v. 20), "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." I decided to make Biblical Studies Ambassador the title of my blog, which communicated my Zambia experiences ([twolthuis.wordpress.com](http://twolthuis.wordpress.com)).

Now in a new position, the President of the Institute for Christian Studies, along with my wife, Dawn Wolthuis (née Hendriksen), and in a new country, Canada, I still see myself as an ambassador. I wish to share my experiences and reflections with you.

I invite you to see yourself as an ambassador. In 2 Cor.

inthians, Paul is writing to a congregation with which he has had a troubled history. Paul had set up the church in Corinth and addressed some of their questions in an earlier letter, but it seems some in the church did not like him or his answers. Paul is again reaching out, seeking reconciliation with God and each other. In this context Paul uses this image of himself as an ambassador.

The Oxford Canadian dictionary defines an ambassador as "an accredited diplomat sent by a state as its permanent representative in a foreign country." An ambassador is an authorized agent sent to represent one ruler to another. It is an important and critical task.

Of course, "ambassador" is an English word translating Paul's Greek word. It is a good translation, but you may find more meaning in Paul's Greek word. It is *presbeuo*, from which we get the word "Presbyterian." I could entitle my column "The Presbyterian," but that brings other pictures into play. Still, this word "presbyterian" means representative leadership, usually by "elders," or old people – a category I am increasingly fitting.

## On both sides

What makes for a good ambassador? A good ambassador has a foot in two worlds. She needs to be a faithful representative of her own country. She needs to know the perspectives and policies of those she is representing. But she also needs to know the country and government to which she has been sent. It is best if she knows the language and the culture of her host. (My wife jokes that we will not worry about learning the language of Canada until next year.)

More importantly, an ambassador's purpose determines his worth. An ambassador may help protect his own citizens in the country or promote trade, but a good ambassador truly seeks the welfare of both countries. A good ambassador seeks to develop a relationship that is beneficial to both sides, and becomes a peacemaker when there is disruption of the relationship. It may be helpful to think of Ken Taylor, the former Canadian ambassador to Iran made famous by the movie *Argo*, or Christopher Stevens, the American ambassador who gave his life seeking to help Libya. (Maybe even Dennis Rodman?)

In this light I seek to be an ambassador in this column. I want to help Christians move between two countries, the daily life we live and some of the worlds with which I have contact. These worlds will vary. Sometimes I will focus on insights or perspectives on the world of Scripture. Other times it will be the worlds of different churches, denominations, and faiths. It may be the worlds of the academy and education, in Canada and the U.S. or throughout the globe. I hope for greater understanding between different groups, greater conversation leading to peace and reconciliation.

I invite you into this task. Ambassadors need counterparts in the dialogue. Through this column I hope to present ideas, information, insight and hope. I hope this helps us become better ambassadors for Christ in our communities and culture. I also hope to receive communication from you to help me and our Christian institutions serve better in the church and in society.

*Dr. Thomas Wolthuis welcomes your response at [TWolthuis@icscanada.edu](mailto:TWolthuis@icscanada.edu).*

## Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



## The kingdom of heaven is like a choir

You haven't lived till you see a seventy-something, tough old dude who looks like he's survived a battle or two, deep lines crisscrossing his face, eyes like horizontal slashes in a rutted terrain, standing ramrod straight, fervently singing about the tender love of his Heavenly Father. Or, next to him, a middle-aged guy with impressive handlebar mustache and dignified demeanour pleading with his "precious Lord" to take him home because he's "tired," he's "weak" and he's "worn." If you're in a grand old church with the rays of the evening sun slanting through stained glass windows and pooling on rich, chocolate-brown pews, you might, like me, feel as if you're on heaven's threshold.

Choirs are a dying breed, but I love them. I've been a member of the Con Spirito Choir since the early 90s. I'd be inclined to boast, but my mom will chime in that she's been in choir for 65 years, so pride is moot. Choirs come in all shapes and sizes – male choruses, four-part mixed choirs, and, my favourite, gospel choirs with robes, clapping and ecstatic improvisations. You can coax ten members of a tiny rural church to line up in front of a piano-playing director and call them a choir.

Here you might be expecting a dirge on the loss of the church's great choral traditions and the dwindling interest of the next generation. But I don't really know enough about music to deliver a convincing rant. I just love to sing

with other believers who also love to sing. And not just for the singing. For whenever a ragtag bunch of choristers gather, I see something about how the Body of Christ is supposed to function.

These kinds of things happen: the director is battling a severe head cold, but he's there with his game face on; the pianist, who's gifted beyond what the choir deserves, is playing the same bass line ten times with exquisite patience; someone is leaning over to point out a tricky CODA to a neighbour who can't read music; a board member has come early to put on the coffee and another one's staying behind to turn off the lights and lock the doors.

## A plural faith

A choir is communal. William Sloane Coffin, well-known American clergyman, has said: "Many of us over-value autonomy, the strength to stand alone, the capacity to act independently. Far too few of us pay attention to the virtues of dependence and interdependence, and especially the capacity to be vulnerable." But a choir does. A choir pays particular attention to the "virtues of dependence and interdependence." A choir has to blend, to bend individual talent to the needs of the whole. To sing in a choir, you have to be willing to be a follower, to place yourself under the leadership of the director. You have to listen to others, adapting your voice, and even your breathing, to those around you. And you have to practise forgiveness. A lot – for this one's excessive vibrato, that one's habit of holding on to a note just a fraction too long. Within all this "interdependence," you're gradually blessed to discover the "peoplehood" of God that Richard Mouw talks about in *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport*, a covenantal togetherness that says you can't be a Christian alone. "Christian" only comes in plural, he says, like southern "grits."

A choir takes sustained work and commitment, very much like the kingdom of heaven Jesus describes in Matt. 24. You have to get up and show some initiative: sow seeds like a farmer, plant a mustard tree, mix yeast like a cook,



*Cathy and her mom are part of Christ's body: choir members.*

let down your nets at dawn. It takes determination – like a merchant who spends all day hunting for that pearl of great price.

Yes, the kingdom of heaven is like a choir. When we're ascribing to the Lord the glory of his name and worshipping him in holy splendor (Ps. 29:2), we're being changed. Singing in a choir places us in Westminster Confession mode where our chief end is defined this way: "to glorify God, and enjoy him forever."

Sometimes, when I'm singing in the choir, that really does happen. I lose myself, enjoying God. When I get to enjoy God forever, in heaven, it might be kind of hard to spot me "crying out with many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand," and "chanting with every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea." I'll be the one belting it out like Mahalia Jackson between tough old veteran dude and distinguished handlebar mustache, waving my palm branch and wearing my white robe.

*Cathy Smith ([cathy@christiancourier.ca](mailto:cathy@christiancourier.ca)) is Features Editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.*



## Columns

Words from  
Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin



## Who's in your corner?



*Be careful . . . make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, while it's still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. (Heb. 3:12-13, NLT)*

Do you have someone in your life who speaks truth? Who encourages and spurs you toward Christ and his likeness? Who cares for you, and in doing so speaks into areas in your life that need encouragement or work? Do you have that trusted friend who is committed in walking with you in your journey of faith?

Most of us desire community and need to feel connected with others. Yet we also have what I call a flesh response, where we'd rather not have people speak into our lives. We feel we can do it on our own and that our decisions are ours and don't affect anyone else.

But Jeremiah 17:9 reads, "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"

And Proverbs 28:26 reads, "Those who trust in themselves [heart] are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe."

Wisdom is the word of God. It's the living, breathing, relevant word of God, which is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. It is our bread and our sustenance and we can't live without it. When we base our motives on what we think our heart "feels," we can easily be strayed off course and onto paths which may feel good, but are far from the best for us and lead us to destruction.

## The folly of following your heart

I listened to my heart once and began to base my identity on how I felt, rather than on the word of God. I began silencing the solid, mature believers in my life, trusting instead my heart's feelings! This led me to the path of identifying myself as a gay man. I believed that because I felt this way, my sexuality was set and I controlled it.

How many of us make decisions based on the sole merit of our feelings? When I proposed to my wife, I had definite feelings for her or I wouldn't have married her. But I also knew that God was calling me to marry her and that I had total peace as I knew this was ordained by him. Do my feelings change on a day-to-day basis as I live out married life? You bet. Some days it's easy to love well and to get along and we find our groove! But there are days when we slog through difficult communication, misinterpretations, sleep deprivation and child rearing. In those times, I need to know that I have a solid foundation of covenant, commitment, perseverance and faith. Those are truths you can lean on, found in the word of God, and they go far beyond "feelings." Marriage is a mindset of being committed, regardless of how I feel.

I need Jesus everyday to walk this out and I need my family the body of Christ to do this as well. I need trusted brothers and sisters to speak truth to me if they see me dabbling in things I shouldn't. I need these broken vessels to encourage me and spur me toward the goal set before me. When I begin to veer off the path, who is there to help me? If I have no one, I can merrily go this way and that.

So who's in your corner? Who knows you and your heart and your life? Who has authority to speak truth in



*Does anyone know your heart, or speak truth into your life?*

love to you, even if it makes you boil inside? Who are you submitted to?

I encourage you to find a good person, not a perfect person (because there isn't one), to be the one who will challenge you and one whom you can challenge. If you have that person, thank God for them. Pray that God brings people into your life who won't just allow you to feel good, but will challenge your "feelings" and spur you toward holiness and the race set before you. It's not easy and each one of us can be easily strayed by appeasing things that tug at our heart.

*Kenny Warkentin (kenny66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.*

## Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



## Too cerebral for my own good?



**Q.** I am a 28-year old single woman and an accountant for a large firm. I have two older brothers who are both married and living on their own. I bought a bungalow a few months ago, which I loved at first sight. I was very happy when everything fell into place in connection with my purchase and I love living in my own home. But I seem to have an unusual problem, which I do not share with anyone since I feel awkward even sharing it with you. It goes something like this.

I am only briefly excited about new things I either buy or experience in my life. After that I fall back into my habitual "way of being," which is pretty flat in terms of emotions. I am not quite sure why this happens. The odd thing is my mind keeps going back to my childhood when I was younger and frequently heard comments about my attractiveness and that "there would be lots of fellows hanging around when I was grown up." Up to now, however, none of it happened. Men are not flocking around me and I do not seem to stand out in terms of physical appearance. The one thing my friends do tell me is that I am too "cerebral," and while I playfully toss the term around, I am beginning to wonder if there is something to this connotation.

**A.** From the sounds of it, you would love to experience more feelings in your everyday life. Yet, upon reading your letter, I noticed you "loved" the bungalow at first sight and you were "very happy" when



*Feeling emotionally flat can be related to how well you empathize with others.*

everything fell into place. Those are two pretty good feelings, for starters. But you address a well-known empirical finding, which research has documented: that when we buy something we really want, within six months the novelty has worn off! For you it happens a little sooner.

At the same time, I believe you may be disappointed in how your life is developing. The comments you heard as a child may have given you high expectations. Still, to have bought a home at your age is pretty amazing! So I would suggest you try again to feel the happiness you felt when you moved into your new home. Sometimes it is good to lengthen the feelings of appreciation so that you can integrate them into your brain (remember my column on neuroplasticity?).

The term "cerebral" suggests you may be too much in your head and not engaged emotionally with your environment, thereby using it as a defense mechanism. This

defense can be like a lid you keep on your feelings so that you can manage them rather than express them. As a consequence, this may minimize some suppressed pain, but also your joys. By being cerebral you can analyze and rationalize about life till the cows come home, but it doesn't touch the core of who you are as an emotional creature and so the lid stays on.

As I have written before, what actually connects us to others is empathy – a powerful emotional bond. Empathy is like "emotional oxygen," it keeps relationships breathing and alive. Without oxygen, we die physically; without empathy, we die emotionally. When we are empathic with one another each person has more confidence in herself and is more able to act. And so, I would suggest you have a few sessions with a therapist to see if you are comfortable with the emotional part of you. Empathy can be innate, part of one's personality, but it also can be suppressed because of some unacknowledged pain. Feel free to also google the term online, as there are various empathy quotients available. Popular theory suggests that empathy can be learned.

In terms of the men whom others thought would be flocking around you by now, I would shrug it off as a typical example of "old school" thinking. While most people would like to marry and have a family, not everyone walks that road. In other words, your life's task is to become a well-rounded person of your own who can contribute in a meaningful way to God's creation, and it seems you are well on your way.

*Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, B.C.*



## Columns

## From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



The research I do as a faculty member is very expensive. I apply for and hopefully will continue to be awarded grants from various government agencies, both provincial and federal. Ultimately these grants come from you as taxpayers. Thank you for your part in supporting researchers. My students and I could not do our research without the funds to buy rats, maintain them, and present and publish our research results.

But these research grants actually cover only a fraction of the true cost of my research. My rat research requires an animal facility. Building such a facility to the standards currently required has a cost (the last time I asked) of about \$5,000 per square metre. The facility in which I and about 10 others do our work is over 800 square metres, clearly a multimillion dollar facility. Then there is the staffing of the facility (two people) and its day-to-day maintenance, all of which the university absorbs in its administrative costs. In Canada none of these costs is covered by my research funds. To these research costs must be added part of my salary; considering that on average 40 percent of a professor's time is dedicated to research and that my salary is listed on Ontario's Sunshine List, this cost is not insignificant.

The privilege that you have given me to carry out my research is one I seek to honour by working hard on important issues that will have long-term benefit to individuals and society. Even so, your funding of my work is a gamble, as research is always open-ended and even with hard work is not always successful.

## Your discipline or mine?

These true costs of research, not to mention the significant costs of teaching, have universities concerned in this time of shrinking budgets. Many Canadian institutions are looking at the range of what they do, asking if they can do everything well. Are there things that they should not be doing? Are there research and teaching areas that they will choose to not support? Some of this prioritizing already exists; not every university teaches engineering, law or medicine, for example. In psychology not every university has the animal facilities that could support my research and teaching; some have chosen to limit the teaching and research in psychology to studying humans without the comparative work of looking at how animals solve problems that humans have to solve as well.

Other choices are made by students;

## Universities adapt to shrinking budgets

if very few apply to enrol in a particular program, then it generally does not grow. Of course, this fiscal prioritizing must be balanced by the need to give students an appropriate education. There are skills that every university graduate should develop: critical thinking, an ability to structure an argument, writing and numeric skills, as well as knowledge of a domain to appreciate the complexity of God's world.

Most universities realize that current budget constraints (and the actual yearly increase in costs) are such that more drastic steps are needed to focus on what they can do well. Cutting the budget of every program by a fixed percentage results in a horrible situation in which excellence suffers because it pays no attention to need and makes no strategic choices on what to protect. Universities need to make difficult decisions.



Budget constraints are forcing universities to focus on what they can do well.

As a result, Wilfrid Laurier University and many other universities are now engaged in planning exercises in which all current programs are evaluated and prioritized: is this a program that will be resourced better, maintained at the current level, transformed or cut? This exercise will take time and these types of decisions are not made lightly, but the process will ultimately lead to a more differentiated university system in which each institution offers a more specific range of programs to serve us all better.

Our religious educational institutions are not immune from these financial pressures, and they too are looking at the programs they offer to determine if they are focusing on what is necessary or spreading themselves too thin. Here the question is perhaps more complex: are there areas that benefit more from being opened in the light of Christ's presence? Perhaps these are programs which should be resourced more. Other expensive programs may be less central to the mission of our Christian universities and may be areas that they choose not to prioritize. My prayers are with those administrators who have to make these difficult decisions at all our universities.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is a member of the Waterloo CRC and, as Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University, is involved in Laurier's prioritizing exercise.

## COMMENT

## Is Jesus Green?

Nick Loenen

Three days from now [May 14] a mere 45 percent of Richmond, B.C.'s registered voters will help select our rulers. The riding-based voting system from the horse and buggy days has determined the outcome. Provincially, the three Richmond constituencies will remain B.C. Liberal. The NDP can't win here in a thousand years. These constituencies are too well-heeled. "It's about the economy, stupid!"

Would God mind if I join the majority and just stay home? We are to pray for government. "Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Praying is no substitute for doing. Pray and work! In the last century, my mother belonged to a women's group by that name, except they had it in Latin.

Should I support the winning candidate? Judging by the campaign, the B.C. Liberal platform consists of one plank: "Don't vote NDP, they can't manage the economy; we can!" Is that claim true? After inheriting a balanced budget from the NDP and 12 years in power the B.C. Liberals have not balanced the budget once but have doubled the debt, instead. So much for truth! Even if the claim was true, is God's kingdom primarily about top economic performance?

On the environment, the B.C. Liberals will allow Alberta's bitumen, the dirtiest on earth, to be shipped through mountains and coastal waters provided the price is right. In addition, they support liquefied natural gas exports. To generate enough electricity, they declared natural gas safe for this purpose and are prepared to move climate targets, once again.

## How would Jesus vote?

How liberal are the B.C. Liberals? Not very! The Bible urges generosity, starting with the laws of Moses. We are to be mindful of the strangers, the poor, the marginalized. The B.C. Liberals chopped income tax by 25 percent then promptly recouped the lost revenue through increased user-fees. Income tax is progressive, user-fees are not. The result is increased inequality. Child poverty rates have improved but are still the highest in Canada. In recent years the B.C. Liberals have simply followed Harper's do-nothing stand on the Aboriginal file. Would Jesus vote B.C. Liberal?

There are three other choices: Conservative, NDP, Green. Such votes would give me a tiny voice, but not help elect anyone. The Conservative platform makes no mention of social conservative issues. Like Harper, they prefer economics. They promise *Smart Spending*. Whatever that means, they'll start by repealing the carbon tax; it has done no good and disproportionately hurts "beyond Hope" residents. Are those claims true? It depends who you

listen to.

Their conservatism is mostly fiscal and less a concern with community, obligation and social justice. They support "social responsibility within the framework of a free-enterprise economic system." Generosity if we can afford it! There is little on stewardship of earth, air and water. Native issues, our province's most troubling moral question, they'll leave to Ottawa. Like Harper, now that crime is down, Conservatives propose to put more people in jail. It may be clever politics but would he who came "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners" approve?

The NDP has run a surprisingly positive campaign with detailed and believable policy proposals. Their leader looks evasive – or is it thoughtfulness, resistance to glib answers? I support the proposals to reform campaign financing, revitalize the Treaty negotiations, address child poverty, provide more support for disabilities and chronic illnesses and to not ship Alberta bitumen to Asia.

This is scary! If I vote NDP, it will be the first time. Why am I hesitant? Perhaps it is lingering Socialism, the hard-core unionists, the sometimes strident demands, insistence on rights more than duties, the tendency to view government as the answer to every human problem. Yet is their open-handedness not closer to the spirit of Jesus than the miserly tight-fistedness of the fiscal conservatives? But can charity be legislated; is love under duress still love? And so it goes! How difficult to discern the will of God!

Only the Greens support scrapping "first-past-the-post" and addictive gambling, issues close to my heart. Like the NDP they have an extensive, detailed platform. Unlike all other parties there is greater concern for the community and less appeal to crass self-interest. Attack ads are not for them. They would ease reliance on fossil fuels with a robust pursuit of renewable energy. These are earnest folk, idealists whose commitment to the common good shines. They don't worship at the temple of production, consumption and GDP.

The Green program, and particularly the manner in which they conduct politics, resonates with Christian sensitivities. In a neighbouring constituency Tim Binnema, a brother in the Lord, is the Green candidate. But there are Christians in every political party. How difficult to be on Jesus' side in politics!

Three days to go. Tomorrow is Sunday. Maybe church will help me discern God's will. I am beginning to turn Green. If this holds, I'll waste my vote as surely as Tim will not win. Jesus was not much into winning, either.

Nick Loenen lives in Richmond, B.C.



## Classifieds

## Anniversary

1953 June 2013

"One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."  
Psalm 27:4

With thankfulness to God, we celebrate the  
**60th wedding anniversary** of:

**CORNELIS & JOHANNA TIMMERMAN (nee Scholten)**

With love from your children, grandchildren and great-children:

John & Yvonne Timmerman (Drayton, Ont.)  
Lori & Ryan Swackhammer (Dundas, Ont.)  
Brady, Kadan, Zachary, Abigail  
Karen & Randy Weber (Elmira, Ont.)  
Sara, Logan, Erica  
Mark & Jen Timmerman (Arthur, Ont.)  
Madison, Joshua, Julia  
Carla (†)  
Bryan & Megan Timmerman (Dundas, Ont.)  
Neveah, Samara, Jenessa  
Harry & Joan Timmerman (St. George, Ont.)  
Jen & Randall Kooops (St. George, Ont.)  
Devin, Dylan, Jordan  
Stephanie & Jeff Rodrigue (Paris, Ont.)  
Nicholas, Zachary  
Ashley Timmerman & Joe Passos (Hamilton, Ont.)  
Calvin, Ethan  
Jaclyn & Erik Timmerman (Woodstock, Ont.)  
Grace & Erwin Raaber (Pickering, Ont.)  
Christopher (Pickering, Ont.)  
Jean & Paul Koomneef (Winona, Ont.)  
Jolene & Ben Tiessen (Ottawa, Ont.)  
Daniel & Rachel Koomneef (Beamsville, Ont.)  
Jestina Koomneef (Erin, Ont.)  
Ron & Shirley Timmerman (Arthur, Ont.)  
Alicia Timmerman (Smithville, Ont.)  
Derek Timmerman (Arthur, Ont.)  
Marilyn & Bert Hogeveen (Caistor Centre, Ont.)  
Amber, Chad, Jazmine

An open house will be held on  
Saturday, June 8, 2013 D.V. from 4:00 – 5:00 p.m.  
at the Smithville Christian High School  
(6488 Smithville Road, Smithville, ON).  
**Best wishes only.**

Address: 403 - 275 Main Street East  
Grimsby ON L3M 5N8

## Obituary

**Dieuwke (Doreen) Beimers Reehoorn**

Nov 25, 1926 - May 13, 2013

Went home to be with the Lord May 13.  
Survived by her loving husband Bert Beimers,  
Sister Gré van Dijk in the Netherlands,  
Sisters-in-law, Brothers-in-law,  
Many nieces and nephews.  
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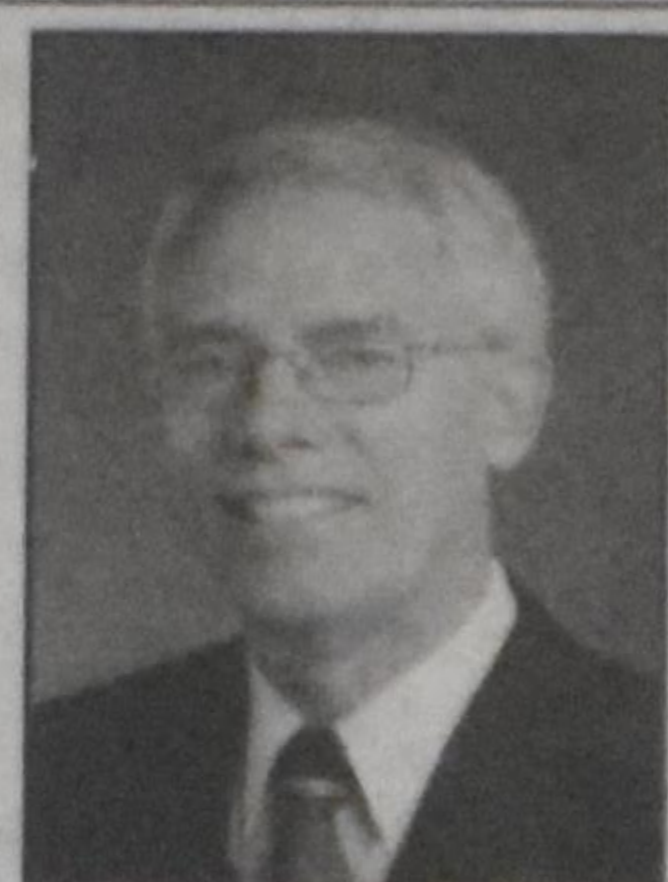
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June 5 Hollandse Dag 10:00 am  
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Egmond: *Wat de toekomst  
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June 7 Retirement open house  
for Pastor James Dekker.  
See p.17 for details

June 9 Dutch Service will be  
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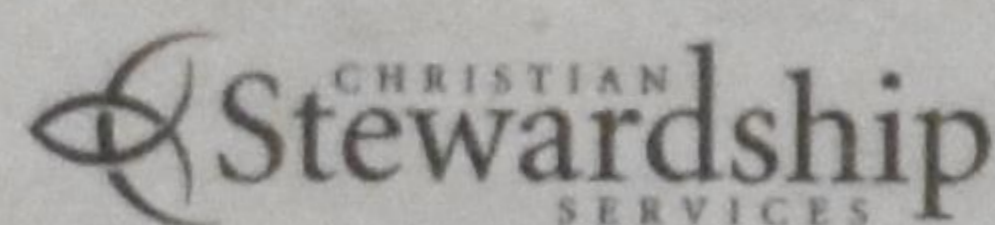
June 19 Hollandse Dag Moore-  
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10 am. Speaker: Rev. John  
Klomp. Details next issue.

July 1 Frisian Picnic, 11 am.  
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## Report ... continued from p.20

### Challenging our perceptions

These events (both the report and the panel discussion, as well as possible future dialogue and vision-rooted change in individual churches) have the potential to play a transformative role. This was clearly indicated by the response to the Redeemer panel discussion: initial interest was so high the event was moved from a lecture hall to the cafeteria, yet they still had to turn people away at the door. The leaders immediately scheduled a repeat of this session for May 9, and announced a follow-up session coming in October. A few days later they announced an upcoming online webinar and discussion (see sidebar on page 20).

The energy and passion evidenced in the audience also indicated that this topic has struck a chord. I am very interested to see where this goes next. From my vantage point, having regularly interacted with youth and young adults for two decades, I believe that some of our churches have historically made two significant errors. First, we have consistently underestimated the complexity and potency of the "majority culture" our young people inhabit, and the guidance and direction they covet. Second, we have too often underrated the spiritual maturity and potential that lies latent in our youth, as well as their desire for authentic interaction and vision-rooted involvement. To a certain extent, the label "youth" is part of the problem. Humanly speaking, every single one of us is simultaneously both being and becoming. Theologically speaking, we are all equal citizens of the Kingdom and brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ. The only difference is that some of us have had a chronological head start.

We often act as if we are waiting for our youth and young adults to grow up and become contributing adults, rather than recognizing that not only are they the future leadership of the church, they are already full-fledged members, and have been for a long time.

All of us are on a lifelong journey of being and becoming, and none of us will ever fully "arrive" (at least not on this side of paradise). As fallen, fallible, lovable individuals, we all do our best to live and serve God in our broken, misdirected world. It is my prayer that the Spirit will work through this report and related follow-up events in our churches and extended church communities to challenge us to recognize that, as Bill Hybels once declared, the "church is the hope of the world," and we are collectively, regardless of our age and maturity, the hands and feet and voice of Christ.

Sean Schat is a former Christian high school teacher currently enrolled in graduate studies in Education at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont. Sean can be reached at [sschat7@gmail.com](mailto:sschat7@gmail.com).



### Next steps

Churches (individual members, church leaders and leadership bodies, youth leaders and youth members) should read the study (**hemorrhagingfaith.com**) and draw on the concluding questions in their subsequent reflections and dialogue.

Churches should host parent discussion and education opportunities. How can the church equip parents to be Kingdom builders in their homes?

Churches should seek opportunities to interact with the voices and leadership gifts of the youth and young adults in their churches, embodying their own baptismal and dedication vows by providing a forum for voices of the youth and young adults to be authentically heard.

Pray that our churches and youth do not squelch the Spirit's outpouring. The Spirit that empowered believers of all ages at Pentecost has never stopped pouring out. But too often we can get in the way of its work in our hearts and lives. The Spirit longs to pour out to overflowing, and to fill the hearts of all of God's children.



*Does your church provide authentic opportunities for the voices of youth to be heard?*



## News

# A barometer for your church: Redeemer panel explores Hemorrhaging Faith report

Sean Schat

*Youth are the barometer of the church and our culture as a whole. This is a story about all of us, not just our youth.* — Peter Schuurman



From left to right: Syd Hielema (inset), Peter Schuurman, John Latta, Dwayne Cline and Natalie Frisk.

On Monday, April 22, a crowd of over 350 gathered in the cafeteria of Redeemer University to listen to a panel discussion on *Hemorrhaging Faith*, a report recently released by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). Sub-titled *Why & When Canadian Young Adults are Leaving, Staying and Returning to the Church*, the report is based on an extensive literature review, a series of coast-to-coast interviews and an Angus-Reid survey of 2,049 respondents. The focus of this two-hour evening session was an overview of the report's highlights and a discussion moderated by Syd Hielema (Redeemer Chaplain). The panel included Dwayne Cline (senior pastor at Hughson Street Baptist Church in Hamilton), Natalie Frisk (youth pastor at The Meeting House in Oakville), and Peter Schuurman (a Youth Ministry instructor at Redeemer).

The *Hemorrhaging Faith* report defines hemorrhaging as an "abnormal, copious loss of a valuable substance" (p. 5). In his introduction to the report's

content, Schuurman challenged the audience to consider whether this title was sensationalistic . . . or prophetic. The results of the study indicate that in many churches there is a marked decrease in youth involvement and attendance. It contrasted data from 1984 and 2008, showing that the number of Canadian teens who identify with a religious tradition has declined: among Catholics from 50 percent to 35 percent, and among Protestants from 35 percent to 12 percent. Meanwhile, "other faiths" have increased from 3 percent to 12 percent, while the number of individuals declaring "no faith at all" has tripled. The study highlights that only 33 percent of Canadian young adults who attended church weekly as a child still do so today. In addition, of those who no longer attend church, half do not identify themselves with the Christian tradition they were raised in. While there has always been a bleeding away of Christian youth, particularly after high school, this indicates a dramatic increase. This study should serve as a clarion call for our churches. Are we in danger of bleeding out?

## Pulled

In his overview, Schuurman distinguished between majority and minority culture. Our youth and young adults daily interact with a majority culture that pulls them away from meaningfully and authentically engaging their faith. According to the report, this culture is characterized by postmodern skepticism, radical autonomy, prolonged identity formation, therapeutic spirituality, discontented consumerism, constant time pressures, an information explosion, ongoing life transitions, constant life distractions that claim time and lifestyle choices that can make church attendance seem hypocritical and irrelevant.

However, the study also pro-

vides a compelling voice of a minority culture, describing homes, churches and schools that speak powerfully into the lives of some of the study's participants. These voices must be heard, and effective patterns and resources identified and explored. Clearly, many of our youth and young adults hear God's call in their lives and take their faith very seriously. Indeed, as Gabe Lyons' *The Next Christians* (2012) has reminded us, there is an emerging new direction that is transforming lives and communities for Christ; we can see young adults using their gifts and embodying their faith.

Hielema articulated the evening's purpose: "to receive an overview of this important study and to examine its implications for discipleship and mission today; to be encouraged to continue to provide wise and discerning leadership in our churches." The bulk of the evening focused on the panelists' responses to three specific questions:

What struck you the most about the report's analysis of the situation?

What are the larger issues behind the analysis?

What specific steps are churches taking (or could churches take)?

This article can't do justice to the rich insights from the panelists and moderator, as well as from the audience-initiated discussion that followed. The evening also raised a number of specific questions for our churches and our approaches to vision, mission and action for the church universal and diverse, not just for youth and young adults.

## Key insights

The *Hemorrhaging Faith* report directed our attention to significant transitions in the lives of youth and young adults, noting that these tend to be moments in their respective journeys where, as Schuurman noted, "they are knocked loose" and begin to move away from church and faith. All three panelists noted that the

high school to university transition may not be as significant as the transition from junior high to high school. Many of the survey respondents identified this point as the significant life stage where faith and church started to lose relevance. Natalie Frisk noted that many of our churches tend to "water things down" for junior high schoolers, yet also stressed that in the "real world," nobody waters anything down for them. She challenged the audience to respect the authenticity and potential of this important age group. Panelists also discussed the concept of emerging adulthood (or "adulthood," as one described it). Many young adults in our culture have extended the time between adolescence and adulthood. This stage is an important time of transition and a redefinition of meaning, purpose and direction. However, it can also be characterized by disconnectedness and a lack of significant attachments and authentic community.

## Larger issues

The panelists explored the role of parents and the interaction between the church and the home (and school). Cline reminded the audience of the important role that parents have in training and coaching and teaching their children, and of the essentiality of the modeling the importance of loving and honouring God in all areas of life. Issues of morality and inconsistency of walk and talk clearly emerged in the study as key factors in the decisions some youth and young adults make to leave the church.

Frisk described a positive shift she has noted in her own ministry, where parents are increasingly partnering with and being involved in youth programs, rather than simply dropping their kids off with "the experts." The importance of parental involvement and the equipping and educating of parents emerged as a significant issue in subsequent audience interactions as well.



Junior high, not university, is where faith and church may start to lose relevance.

## Specific steps for churches

Cline challenged the audience and the churches they represented to be missional in their approach to youth and young adults. Many of our youth are wired for faith and service, and earnestly desire to be part of an active, vibrant church. They simply need opportunities, encouragement and modeling. However, he also challenged our churches to balance the missional with the monastic. Our churches need to focus on the presence of Christ, and focus on the role of the Spirit in all aspects of our daily lives. A deep and balanced love of Christ leads to a transformed and transformational life. Frisk challenged churches to provide authentic opportunities for the voices of our youth to be heard. She is confident that many of our young people want to be disciples of Christ; they want to be both led and heard. They want authenticity, and they desire opportunities for dialogue and wrestling with important life issues, not just "the answers" that can at times too easily emerge in our youth programs. Schuurman concluded by drawing our attention back to the *Hemorrhaging Faith* study, which provided a number of specific questions for churches to wrestle with in response to the report.

See Report on page 19



## Looking ahead

Webinar – Peter Schuurman will leading a free webinar (registration required) on this topic through the CRC Network on May 30 at 1:30 p.m.

Follow-up Session – CLEAR (Redeemer University's continuing education program) will host a follow-up workshop session in October.